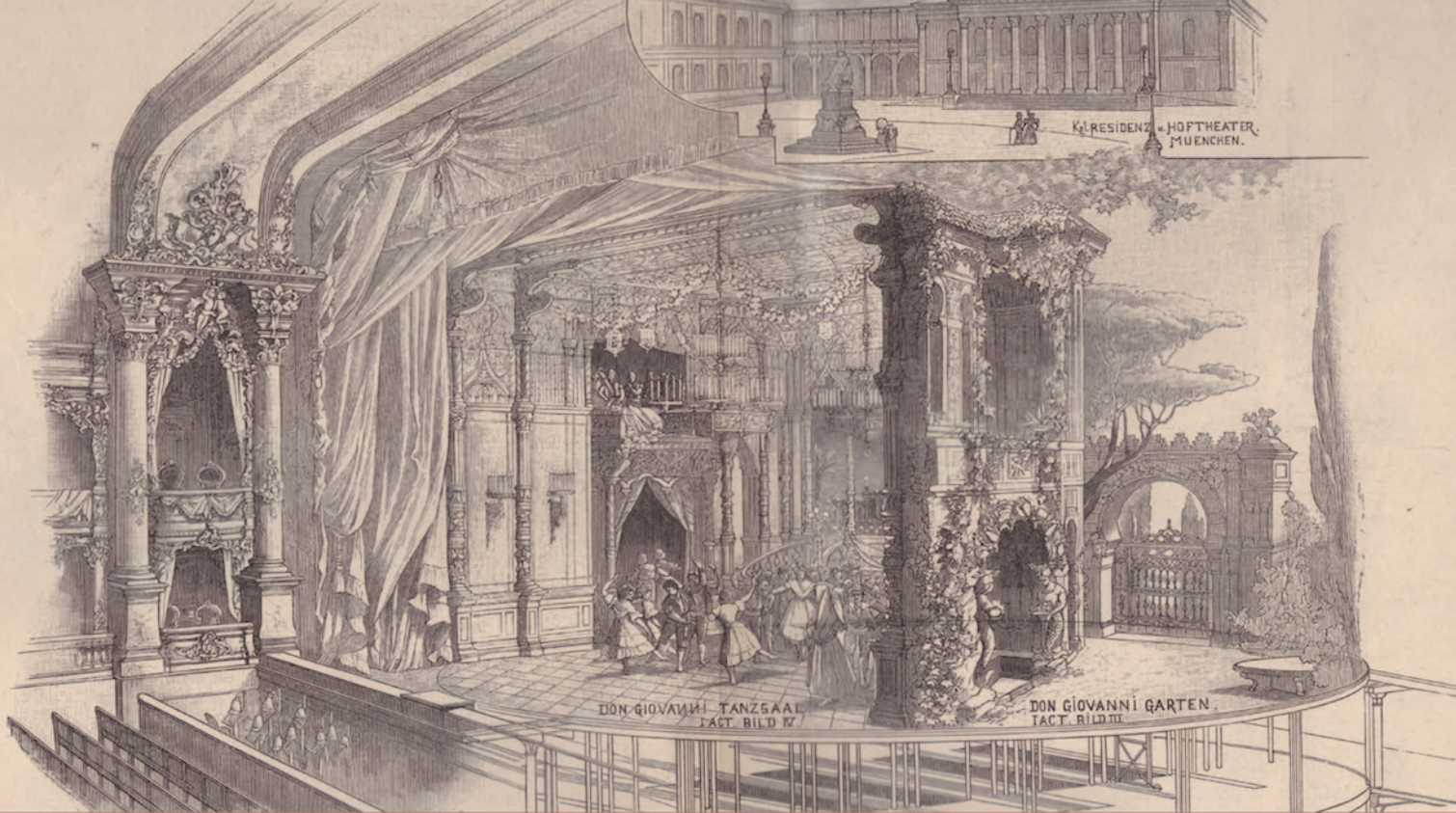




ARCHITHEATER

BADIOU | STUDIES

VOLUME 5 • 2017

Journal of Badiou Studies
Volume 5 :: 2017
ISSN 2049-9027

Architheater



Adi Eyal-Lautenschläger
Guest Editor



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First published in 2017
punctum books
Earth, Milky Way
<https://punctumbooks.com>

ISBN-13: 978-1-947447-06-6 (print)
ISBN-13: 978-1-947447-07-3 (ePDF)

LCCN: 2017945568

ISSN: 2049-9027

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from the Library of Congress.

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<https://www.badioustudiesjournal.org>

The *Journal of Badiou Studies* is a multi-lingual, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the philosophy and thought of and surrounding the philosopher, playwright, novelist and poet Alain Badiou. *JBS* is dedicated to radically original, critical and challenging arguments that directly engage with the conditions and circumstances of Badiou's thought. We aim to identify pertinent intellectual discourses, ideas, historiographies and concepts, and seek articles that situate these theories within emerging events in politics, science, art and love. Book reviews, reports of related activities and experimental texts are also warmly welcome.

JBS is especially concerned with maintaining a fidelity to Badiou's thinking without collapsing into hagiography or celebrity fetishism. This is why we encourage works that actively critique Badiou's philosophy and his currency as an established philosophical figure. This engaging approach is warmly embraced by Badiou himself, a member of our board of editors. Our board comprises international scholars who are representative of our pioneering approach to research in the field, which is both radical and widely interdisciplinary.

The aim of *JBS* is to develop a clear and transparent space for scholars interested in Badiou's ideas to come together, share research, and engage in productive dialogue. In keeping with this aim, we publish articles in multiple languages. We believe that the unification of academic and intellectual activity into one 'lingua franca' is counter-productive to originality and true representation.

JBS is peer-reviewed and entirely free (no-fees open-access), and has been since its foundation at the University of Leeds (UK) in 2012. This is true for all *JBS* publications and events. This commitment to the radically free exchange of ideas can lead down beautiful and unexpected paths, opening-up alternative modes of thought, as well as it can warrant attempts at destructive exchange. *JBS* defends the fidelity and integrity of creative experimentation wherever that path may lead.

Journal of Badiou Studies 5

Architheater

Adi Efal-Lautenschläger, Guest Editor

Michael J. Kelly and Arthur Rose, General Editors

Table of Contents

Adi Efal-Lautenschläger	Introducing Architheater 1-6
Martin Puchner	The Theatre of Alain Badiou (2009), with a new Preface 7-22
Daniel Whistler	'Unutterable Utterances' and 'Mysterious Naming': Nomination in Badiou and the Theater of Mysticism 23-51
Johannes Schick	Theaters of Individuation: Gilbert Simondon and the Interrelations of Ethics, Techniques, and Ontology 53-84

Aline Wiame

What Does It Take to Open a Theater? The
Réouverture des Halles Experiment in Brussels

85-102

Renaud Pleitinx

Badiou en Architecture

103-112

Marc Belderbos

Dispositions au pas du Réel

113-130

Arthur Rose

The Theater of Modern Philosophy: A Review of
Alain Badiou, Rhapsody for the Theatre

131-135

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Cover Image

Karl Lautenschläger, figure from the article "Eine neue Bühne," *Bühne und Welt. Zeitschrift für Theaterwesen, Literatur und Kunst*, Berlin, 1899.



HIC SVNT MONSTRA

Introducing Architheater: Modellings

Adi Efal-Lautenschläeger

Je vous récapitule tout ça dans l'espace.¹

As some of the contributors of the volume observe, Badiou's philosophy does not entail an explicit theory of architecture: nevertheless, his thought is rigorously architectural. That is, a philosophy directed at the definition of foundations, erection, installation, solidity, destruction, consistency, demolition, stability, discernment of chance and circumstances, all pertaining to basic procedures and gestures of architecture. As **Marc Belderbos** underlines in his contribution, "Théâtre sur le Réel – Architecture sur le Réel," to the present volume, *Journal of Badiou Studies (JBS)* 5: Architheater, placement is an important theme in Badiou's philosophy, if not, from a certain perspective of viewing his work, its central theme. Yet of course, placement is not identical with architecture. Nevertheless, what are 'conditions' for Badiou if

¹ Alain Badiou, *Théorie du Sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 191.



not calibrations of placement? What is a 'subject' if not an interlacing of these conditions and the truths generated by them? What is 'being', in Badiouian terms, if not a structured grouping of such placements? In fact, what is philosophy itself, in Badiou's terms, if not a genre of placement, the giving of an account of the compossibilities of the transcendental of a certain truth-procedure which is always a subject to be generated?² Philosophy, for Badiou, so this *JBS* volume suggests, is architectural. It is a manner of collecting the bits and parts of truths in their respective generative domains of production, and staging and mounting them in certain historical moments of surge.

This architectural orientation of Badiou's thought appears from early on, but it comes in many guises. In *Théorie du Sujet*, for example, Badiou defines the "objective" as "the process by which force is placed, being impure".³ *Objective*, in Badiou, is the placement of force. And while philosophy is placement, it is, in its nature, impure. It relates to states and to the State, to ontology and to logics of worlds, all being differentiated from the fidelity of ethics, which is the subjective gesture par excellence. It seems that Badiou is one of the last architectural thinkers, his books sometime remind of (but only *remind* of) the great Idealist constructions of the nineteenth century. That is why, differently from many other twentieth-century philosophers, both analytical and continental, Badiou's philosophy is properly *monumental*, not in the sense of being 'big' or 'great' but in the sense of being tectonic, extending, expressing an effort for stability, a resistance to the anti-philosophical skeptical drifts, both from the continental and the analytical fronts of philosophy.

In Badiou's philosophy, both subject and object relate to architectural practices. Their coming together, their actuality, is already, so this volume suggests, *architheater*. It involves not only placement but also force, which is *pure*. Not only a terrain but also a fidelity. Not only the impurity of placements but also the purity of action, of generation, of *surging*. Not only *esplace* then, but also *horlieu*.⁴ In his *JBS* 5 contribution "Badiou en Architecture", **Re-naud Pleitinx**, a practicing architect and a theoretician of architecture, states the difficulties in applying Badiou's philosophy to the practice of architecture, but nevertheless claims that Badiou's philosophy carries genuine interest for architects. Pleitinx touches a nerve regarding the status of Badiou's philosophy itself: it is a philosophy which is only with difficulty applied, a character which differentiates it from many of the key players of French philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century (for example, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and

² Alain Badiou, *Logique des Mondes* (Paris, Seuil, 2006), 107-84.

³ Badiou, *Théorie du Sujet*, 59: "On appellera (...) 'objectif' le processus par quoi la force est placée, donc impure."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-29.

Jacques Lacan, and even Gilles Deleuze for that matter). His philosophy stands as a model: take it or leave it, walk with it as a companion or leave it aside. This, on the other hand and only to its merit, also makes of Badiou's philosophy a poor interpretive tool. Much more than a tool to be applied, Badiou's philosophy works itself like a model, producing a work of formalization (a concept to which he dedicated one of his earlier texts⁵), and perhaps supplying the doer some hints as to how to direct his own subsistence. Tzuchien Tho, in an interview annexed to the English translation of the *Concept of the Model*, asks Badiou about his formalism.⁶ Badiou answers that,

even if it is not right to consider formalism as something constituted as intentional subjectivity, it was necessary to take and maintain some aspects of subjectivity in the elements of formalism itself. [...] Formalization, in its essence, is not only mathematical or logical. While mathematical and logical formalization is a paradigm for formalization, formalization is not identical with this [...] Definitively, the study of different types of generic procedures is truly the study of the different types of formalization [...] And thus the model since my earliest reflections, has been something that assumes the particularity or the singularity of a region of being or of a world, and at the same time, raises the universality of a possible new formalization.⁷

Thus, a model must be built as a parallel to a particular generic procedure. The mounting of the model must follow, be loyal to, a particular generic reality in question. Yet even when erected, the model cannot be used as a hermeneutical prism helping to understand or to find the meaning of given phenomena: it is rather a persistent *batiment*, insisting and staying at its place, against which and to the side of which one can place one's own choices and erections. As a model, it can be used as a surface against which some realities can be evaluated or refigured. This is how Badiou's philosophy reinforces the transfiguration of architectural placements into theaters of forces. Artistic truth-procedure, or in-aesthetics itself has a function of a placement of a truth *within* a model.⁸

Not everything is placement in Badiou. There is also a subject. The subject which is pure ethic, a drama, but also a whole theater production, hazard, risk and heroic fidelity. A subject

⁵ See Alain Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, ed. and trans. Z.L. Fraser and Tzuchien Tho (Melbourne: re.press, 2007).

⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁷ Ibid., 88-91.

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

which is courage, justice, anguish, over-me (*surmoi*, the translation to “super-ego” seems, in this case, improper).⁹ Here comes theater. Here we have the dramatic, subject figures that Badiou discusses: Orestes, Athena, Antigone, Creon. The play can begin, and moreover it is not that the play, as the Mallarmean throw of the dice, can begin, rather, sometimes, when truth calls, it **must** begin. Working in the spaces between architecture and theater, Badiou’s philosophy works and reworks what one can call a ‘consistence’: how a figure concurs and shapes the State: Antigone challenges and overcomes Creon. This ethical scenario is no less than a theater of individuation, demanding a whole technical construction in order to come about.

One of the ways to approach this technical aspect of Badiou’s thought is canvassing Badiou’s philosophy with the French epistemological tradition of Georges Canguilhem and Gilbert Simondon. **Johannes Schick’s** JBS 5 essay, “Theaters of Individuation: Simondon and the Interrelations of Ethics, Techniques and Ontology, on the Theater of Individuation in Simondon,” presents the general principles and considerations of the actual mounting of ethical mechanics of individuation. Simondon, it seems, suggests a middle way between Badiou and Deleuze: a formation of the subject which is entirely engineered by the technical strata. Both **Schick** and **Wiame** (see below) are writing from without the badiouesque framework and they elicit issues that one should necessarily consider when approaching theater and placement in Badiou, with its location within the history of philosophy of our times.

Architecture and theater belong to two different generative domains in Badiou’s philosophy. Theater, as Oliver Feltham (2016) has been arguing (for example, in “Badiou and the Architheatre of Action,” a seminal and groundbreaking lecture-essay not yet printed but already influential¹⁰) has to do with emergence, with the generation of truth and with the generative practices, in as much as architecture has more to do with the maintenance and the making consistent of a generated truth. Theater is primary (and pure) while architecture, in this sense, is secondary (and impure). As always in Badiou (a true Cartesian [also] at this point) the two are not only the conditions of revolution, but also of love, of *dialectique*, hence of truth. Without *architheater* and with architecture (or with theater) alone there will be only improper naming, which Badiou conceives as a threat to ethics.

Daniel Whistler, in his contribution “‘Unutterable Utterances’ and ‘Mysterious Naming’:

⁹ Badiou, *Théorie du Sujet*, 191.

¹⁰ Oliver Feltham, “Arche-theatre, the action zone and the declaration of the state,” paper presentation, Munich, Germany, 18 January 2016, Academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/22087078/Arche_theatre_the_action_zone_and_the_declaration_of_the_state_Jan_2016_Munich.

Nomination in Badiou and the Theater of Mysticism", develops from this point an important and thorough review not only of strategies of naming but also, sincerely, at the mystical character of Badiou's philosophy. Whistler works with Badiou's categories in order to make apparent the essential characters of Romantic literary generics, again treating Badiou's philosophy as a model, not as a hermeneutical prism. As in *Ethics*, Badiou counts naming as one of the dangers for fidelity, Whistler shows to what extent the naming of what Badiou calls in *Théorie du sujet* "La force" is a task in itself and must always come to terms with the challenges of mysticism and, from the other direction, of iconoclasm: remaining vigilant regarding the danger of the false idols of all kinds. Badiou's theory of art is iconoclastic in the good sense of the word. It is iconoclastic as it has no intention of endowing the senses with the status of supplying a first-philosophy, as that which is "placed" in a work of art is nothing but a truth. Both architecture and theater as generic forms are capable of being iconoclastic in this good sense of the term. Architecture is iconoclastic, as no one can argue against an architectural work that it seduces without avail: architecture is always in reality, it is always intended for the usage of the people and of some polis, and it is criticized or evaluated also according to this usage. That is why from all the arts it is architecture that must be involved in any conception of the city-state; it cannot be banished because if it were there would be no state at all. Architecture is the state, and it is the State. If architecture, impure, is always iconoclastic to some existent, theater, pure, can be iconoclastic when it works for a subject and against false and gross naming, against propaganda. But this is not given, in theater, in advance. This has to be negotiated, and in this negotiation there is always, essentially and necessarily, an architectural element.

Indeed, as one sees also from the contribution of **Aline Wiame**, "What Does It Take to Open a Theater? The Réouverture des Halles Experiment in Brussels", Badiou's views of arts, as well as of the State, are not immune to criticism, and they certainly verge on a certain amount of rigidity. Badiou's always classical, indeed *architectural* approach to theater as well as to truth does not always go very well with a more open or elastic conception of instauration (as in Etienne Souriau). The limitation of working with Badiou's concepts in order to give an account of the layered and dynamic happening of radical democracy is of course apparent also in the Badiou-Deleuze and the Badiou-Rancière divides. Badiou was never a great fan of democratic procedures and experiments. One can in fact draw from this another insight: the effect of Badiou's philosophy is one of a limitation, or, if one wants, of castration. We all know, of course, how important castration was as a concept to Freud and to Lacan in their articulation of the subject, which Badiou considers as one of the important inventions of the twentieth century. As Oliver Feltham argues in the essay mentioned above, the rivalry be-

tween philosophy and theater is a grave one, and it has to do with the question of the order of the city-state. Wiame in her article touches on this point of the tenacity of Badiou's relation to theater and of the intricate, and always concrete, technical problems that are involved in such an operation. Building a theater in the city is a question of placement, and therefore, of what Badiou calls since *Logiques des Mondes*, a transcendental: a minimum and an enveloping of a "world."¹¹

Finally, but also firstly, the opening essay of the volume is a reprint, with a specially written new introduction, of **Martin Puchner's** pioneering essay "The Theater of Alain Badiou." Puchner was early to acknowledge the contribution of Badiou, not only to the understanding of the relationship between Philosophy and Theater, but also to the theory of theater itself. Again, as Feltham emphasizes, drama is not only the figure of truth but also the reality of action, standing at the basis of Badiou's philosophy. There is theater where action is not only generated but also staged. When an action is generated, there has been a truth. Puchner returns us at the beginning of his essay to Plato's cave, where theater takes place. It is, indeed, the cave, where shadows can be drawn, where shackles can be belted or disjoined, that this volume is interested: this is architheater.

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¹¹ Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes*, 175-77.

The Theater of Alain Badiou¹

Martin Puchner

The essay that follows emerged from my long-standing interest in the relation between theater and philosophy. As someone who has spent a lot of time doing both, I have always been convinced that the mutual hostility between theater and philosophy, with philosophers attacking the theater as corrupting and false and thespians shunning abstract ideas as irrelevant, was only part of the story. In order to tell the fuller story, one in which theater and philosophy were shown to be deeply entangled with each other, I needed to start with Plato, who was often seen as the first philosopher hostile to the theater. It was in the course of looking for allies in this undertaking that I turned to Alain Badiou. Two things struck me about his

¹ This article was originally published in *Theatre Research International* 34.3 (2009): 256-66. The editors of *JBS* warmly thank the journal, Cambridge University Press, and Martin Puchner for their permission to reprint this essay with a newly composed authorial introduction.

Journal of Badiou Studies 5 :: 2017

ISSN 2049-9027



thought: unlike most twentieth-century and twenty-first century philosophers, Badiou went back to Plato (rather than presenting himself as an anti-Platonist); and his interest in Plato was part of a fascination with theater. Putting the two things together, I began to consider Badiou a “dramatic Platonist,” as I put it in *The Drama of Ideas*, the book in which I tried to capture a double history of theater and philosophy.²

Around this time, I was lucky enough to end up on a podium with Badiou, at an event hosted by New York University. With some trepidation, I seized the opportunity to ask him during my response whether he agreed with my description of him as a “dramatic Platonist.” He paused, reflected, and burst out with his characteristic giggly laughter. To my relief, he finished the outburst with an enthusiastic “yes.”

What does this have to do with architecture? Badiou has not written much about architecture, and yet his thought has fascinating implications for architecture; this, no doubt, is the motivation behind the present publication. I had occasion to think about these implications a few years ago, when Ariane Lourie Harrison invited me to talk about Alain Badiou at the Yale School of Architecture. Talking about a philosopher at Yale is, of course, nothing out of the ordinary. The Yale School of Architecture has long been associated with a particularly intellectual approach to the trade, for example through which figures as Peter Eisenman, one of Ariane Harrison’s mentors. Ariane Harrison herself is deeply interested in the performing arts, since her atelier, co-founded with her husband Seth Harrison, has specialized in the relations between architecture and the performing arts. During the conversation with Ariane Harrison and her students, it became clear to all of us that Badiou’s understanding of theater was in fact an excellent way of approaching architecture.

The word theater comes from the Greek *theatron*, which describes not an art form, nor a genre or a type of entertainment. Rather, it describes a designed space, a piece of architecture: a ‘place of seeing’. A *theatron* is a space designed to allow one group of people to watch an event performed by another group of people. This designed space or building is the medium within which particular acts of theater are performed and watched.

When I teach theater history, I always begin with this architectural origin of theater in the large open-air theaters of Greece before moving on to the full-fledged theater buildings in the Renaissance and then to our own intimate theaters and theatrical activities taking place outside traditional theater spaces. For me, the most crucial part of this history is the raised stage, which begins in Rome and reaches its zenith in the nineteenth century: the raised

² Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theatre and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

stage lifts theatrical events off the ground and allows dramatists, actors, and directors to manipulate space at will.³

In Badiou's understanding of theater, the physical arrangement of space does not receive much explicit attention, but it forms the basis for his understanding of theater. He begins by noting our current fascination with materiality, which he diagnoses as a belief system that posits bodies and languages as the only building blocks from which the world is composed. This is our materialist assumption in most things, but it is particularly strong in the theater. The theater, we are always told, is an art of the body. It is a doctrine that is presented with a considerable amount of enthusiasm: what's great about the theater is its physicality. This usually means first of all the physicality of actors, who stand there, in the flesh, on stage. But this fascination with materiality can be extended to the audience, which is assembled, also in the flesh, in the place of seeing. I might add that these two physical or material entities are made possible by a third, namely the physical space of the theater.

This is our current description of theater, and it is precisely this description that Badiou criticizes, or rather critically supplements, with an addition: yes, he admits, there are only bodies and languages; except that there are also truths. That addition changes everything, or almost everything. In the theater, this means that the actors' bodies are shot through with ideas. And not just the actors' bodies; the entire theater becomes nothing but a theater of ideas, in his memorable and provocative phrase.

I would argue that what Badiou says about bodies in the theater and the physical, material reality of the theater can be extended to architecture. Architecture, even more so than theater, is the most material art form (I know this first hand because my father was an architect and took me to many construction sites when I was growing up). With Badiou, one might say that this materiality should not lead us to think of architecture as yet another art form of the body. Rather, we should say that yes, in architecture there are only bodies and (architectural) languages; except there are also truths. This means that the material out of which architecture is made does not rest in its materiality; it is shot through with ideas. For Badiou, the conclusion would be clear: all architecture is an architecture of ideas.



Throughout its history, philosophy has used the theater in two ways. The dominant way is as

³ Martin Puchner, "The Problem of the Ground: Martin Heidegger Site-Specific Performance," in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay (London: Palgrave, 2014), 65-86.

a model of representation. Here the theater creates the distinction between appearance and truth. The origin of this model is, of course, Plato's parable of the cave in book VII of the *Republic*, which presents a puppet-master creating visual and auditory effects for the benefit of an imprisoned audience.⁴ This shadow theater must be abandoned in order for an upper realm of truth to be accessed, as happens when a prisoner escapes to the real world above. Theater, in other words, stands for illusion in contrast to philosophical truth: in order for philosophy to occur, we must leave the theater behind.

The cave paradigm has had a profound impact on the relation between philosophy and theater. Theater studies has tended to view this impact as negative; the theater, after all, is cast as the villain in this drama of illusion and truth, prison and escape. Jonas Barish has summed up this conventional wisdom by coining the term "anti-theatrical prejudice".⁵ In the meantime, however, dramatists returned to Plato's cave with a very different set of interests. Rather than holding it responsible for fostering a 'prejudice', they recognized it as what it really was: a moment when Plato's philosophy avails itself of the resources of the theater. The cave parable – with its gothic shadows and ominous sounds, and the suggestion of lifelong bondage in an underground dungeon – is itself the product of a dramatic and theatrical imagination of the highest order. Into this carefully elaborated scene is then dropped the plot of the freed prisoner, his dramatic experiences in the upper world, the painful process of getting used to the sun, and then, at the climax, the descent back into the cave, where he and his news of the upper world are greeted first with laughter and finally with violence.

Refusing to dismiss this tragic drama as prejudice, dramatists of various ilk have adapted this parable to the stage. The British composer Alexander Goehr, for example, composed a chamber opera called "Shadowplay" in which a tenor sings the text of the parable only to be joined by a prisoner who enacts, in front of our very eyes, the drama of escape and ascent.⁶ Another adaptation of the cave parable can be found in Howard Brenton's "Bloody Poetry", a play set among the Romantic writers Bysshe and Mary Shelley, Lord Byron and their entourage on Lake Geneva. In a central scene, the group decides to 'do' the cave parable and proceeds to enact this scene.⁷ Byron's pedantic biographer is forced to play the prisoner, the overbearing Lord Byron is demoted to playing the minor role of Glaucon, while Mary Shelley takes on the part of Socrates. The stage directions elaborate just how the cave and the shad-

⁴ Plato, *Republic*, books VI–X, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 119ff.

⁵ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁶ Alexander Goehr, *Shadowplay* (Mainz: Schott, 1970).

⁷ Howard Brenton, *Bloody Poetry* (London: French, 1985), 41.

ows are transposed to the space of the stage: a chandelier is placed at the front of the stage representing the source of light, the fire. The chandelier merely 'represents' the fire because the stage direction makes it clear that in truth it is the footlights that cast the characters' shadows on the back of the stage: the stage props are replaced by the real stage, and the parable by the theater. More recently, the cave has been appropriated by film, and in much the same manner. *The Truman Show*, for example, creates the shadow cave as a reality show in which a child, purchased by the television company, grows up in a carefully set up all-American town, only to discover slowly that everyone else is merely playing a role.⁸ In this case, when the prisoner finally ascends from his constructed world, he moves from his brightly lit cave to the darkness of the control room above; Plato's crucial difference between darkness and light is thus inverted. The conclusion to be drawn from these theatrical adaptations of the cave parable is that far from being merely the cause of a hostile relation between philosophy and theater, the parable constitutes a genuine encounter between philosophy and theater, a moment when philosophy needs the theater and uses it in a carefully elaborated manner. Small wonder, then, that the theater has responded in kind by adapting the parable's theatrical matrix to the stage.

Besides the cave paradigm, however, there exists a second model for the relation between philosophy and theater, one that is more difficult to capture: the use of drama as a paradigm for philosophy understood as act or action. In this second paradigm, there is nothing illusory or false about the theater; instead it becomes a model for philosophy as something that happens in the manner of an act or event. Interestingly enough, this second model can also be traced back to Plato, though not to a particular scene or terminology as is the case with the cave parable and its language of (theatrical) illusion and (philosophical) truth. Rather it is to be found in Plato's use of the dramatic form of the philosophical dialogue, which implies a conception of philosophy as an act executed by agents in a series of arguments. This is just a way of stating the obvious, perhaps, although the obvious in this case has not always been recognized: Plato invents characters, places them in scenes, and has them enact particular philosophically driven actions, or plots. Philosophy is not something that occurs in the privacy of your own mind, but something that is done, acted out in particular scenes and interactions. Borrowing a term from another theatrical philosopher, Kenneth Burke, I will call this second paradigm 'dramatism', since Burke used drama as a paradigm for a philosophical scheme centered on agents, actions, and the purpose of action.

⁸ Peter Weir, dir., *The Truman Show*, Paramount Pictures, 1998.

The dramatic form of the philosophical dialogue embodies the classical understanding of philosophy as intimately tied to conduct, habits and actions rather than to a set of doctrines or beliefs. If you believe that philosophy has to do with the actions of agents, you find yourself in the realm of drama. Only on occasion have modern philosophers continued this dramatic understanding of Plato's philosophy. A notable, and in some respects surprising, exception was Michel Foucault, not a philosopher generally recognized for his interest in drama and theater. This, however, changed notably in the lectures given at the Collège de France during the last years of his life.⁹ Devoted to the Greek term *parrhesia*, or truth-telling, Foucault elaborates the dramatic coordinates of this understanding of philosophy by differentiating his 'dramatic' analysis of philosophical truth from J.L. Austin's theory of 'performative' speech acts.¹⁰ Foucault's last lectures, which also contain fascinating discussions of Greek tragedy and the death of Socrates, have yet to be discovered by theater studies; once they are translated into English (they appeared in France only in 2008 and 2009 respectively) this will hopefully change.

While modern philosophers have rarely paid attention to this dramatic (or dramatistic) dimension of philosophy, there exists a long and remarkable tradition of playwrights who recognized Plato's dialogues as a dramatic form and decided to follow suit. I have so far found over a hundred plays, written since the Renaissance, centered on the philosopher Socrates and adapted, more or less directly, from Plato's dialogues. Often these playwrights combined the material from the most theatrically vivid dialogues, such as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*, or found other ways of portraying the remarkable actions of this quintessential philosopher and the characters with whom Plato had surrounded him. While not a major force in the history of drama, these Socrates plays, as I call them, pay homage to Plato as a dramatist.

Among the living philosophers, no one stands more clearly at the intersection of theater and philosophy than Alain Badiou, whose significance for the study of theater cannot be overestimated. In the context of this essay, his importance lies in the fact that he moves between the various traditions and models outlined above. In line with the dramatistic model, for example, Badiou writes, "for me, philosophical theatricality indicates that the essence of philosophy [...] is an act".¹¹ At the same time he holds on to the classical philosophical search for truth, precisely the term that organizes the cave parable in which theater is used as a locus

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres (1982-83)*, ed. Frédéric Gros et al. (Paris: Ehes, Seuil and Gallimard, 2008); Michael Foucault, *Le Courage de la Vérité: Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres II (1984)*, ed. Frédéric Gros et al. (Paris: Ehes, Seuil and Gallimard, 2009); Michael Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).

¹⁰ Foucault, *Le Gouvernement*, 59.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, with a preface by François Wahl (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992), 103 n. 15.

of falsehood. Badiou's twin conceptions of philosophy as act and as truth are in the service of a new Platonism. His call for a return to Plato even includes the demand that "we can, we must write for our contemporaries, Republics and Symposiums."¹² Uniquely among contemporary philosophers, Badiou brings together the cave model and the dramatistic model and traces both of them back to Plato.

What Badiou cares most about when he calls for a return to Plato is the continuation of philosophy as an independent discipline. It is this integrity of philosophy, he feels, that has been under threat throughout the last one-hundred-fifty years, during which time philosopher after philosopher has declared the end of metaphysics and therefore the end of philosophy as it had been instituted by Plato. Friedrich Nietzsche's attack on Platonism is the most famous example of this tradition of seeking to end philosophy, but Badiou also includes Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida.¹³ Declaring the end of (Platonist) metaphysics, Badiou argues, comes at too steep a price, and he measures this price in terms of Plato: it means ceding philosophy to its enemies, the sophists and other relativists; it means giving up that which has distinguished philosophy from sophistry, namely the category of truth.¹⁴ It is important to recognize that Badiou is not an idealist in the sense of asserting the existence of concrete universals. For him, reversing anti-Platonism is a way of staying true to the project of philosophy itself, "philosophy as it was instituted by Plato".¹⁵ And that project cannot do without the concept of truth. Once philosophy gives up truth, it reverts to sophistry, relativism, the description of an ever-changing world. Badiou identifies with Plato when he watches modern anti-Platonist philosophy tear down Plato's bulwark against relativism. Philosophical self-critique is all well and good, but modern anti-Platonism has thrown out the baby with the bathwater, ensuring the death of philosophy in the process.

The philosopher who represents, for Badiou, an intriguing version of this anti-Platonist tendency is Gilles Deleuze. Drawing on Nietzsche among others, Deleuze had positioned his own philosophy of the multiple against Plato, making anti-Platonism the center of his method. In many ways, Deleuze is the perfect example of what happens when you declare Platonist metaphysics to be over: all that is left to do is to celebrate contingency, immanence, heterogeneity and endless series of differences, reveling in the sheer groundlessness of all thinking: "Deleuze is the cheerful thinker of the confusion of the world," Badiou writes, who

¹² Ibid., 77.

¹³ Ibid., 307.

¹⁴ Ibid., 75.

¹⁵ Ibid., 77.

offers “an immense description, a collection of today’s diversity”.¹⁶ Deleuze is the thinker of bodies, of endlessly differing identities, of machines, of matter in its myriad forms, a Dionysian thinker of the multiple, the thinker who identified his own writing with the project of a ‘reversal of Platonism’. Deleuze, of course, was himself a philosopher deeply engaged with the theater, especially in his 1968 early work *Difference and Repetition*,¹⁷ which celebrates the theater as an art form prone to disrupt the principle of identity and difference on which idealist philosophy had staked so much.¹⁸ Indeed, Foucault gave Deleuze’s book a rave review, speaking about his conception of a theatrical philosophy as one immersed in bodies and screams. Theater here functions very much along the lines of the cave paradigm, only now it is the bodies, not the ideas, that are valued above all.¹⁹

Without discussing this theatrical dimension of the debate, Badiou proceeds to the second step in his argument, namely that in reversing Plato, Deleuze has left Platonism more or less intact. Yes, Badiou declares, Deleuze enjoys his bodies, multiplicities, minor languages and endless series of differences, but behind this immense mobilization of difference lurks the same old distinction between appearance and essence first made in Plato’s cave parable. The only difference is that Deleuze enjoys the multiple appearances of shadows on the wall and feels little desire to turn around and leave the cave. Deleuze does not dismantle the Platonist distinction between appearance and essence, but merely changes the values assigned to them, favoring the ever-changing world of appearance over the Platonic ascent to the realm of ideas. The same argument can be made with respect to other anti-Platonists, since it speaks to a danger almost invariably associated with reversal: reversing Platonism leaves the distinction between cave and upper world in place and only reverses the values associated with it. In a way, modern philosophy has never stopped paying homage to the cave, even if it has tended to do so by means of reversal.

The surprising twist in this interpretation of Deleuze occurs in a third argument: Deleuze starts out as Platonist in reverse, but he ends up being a Platonist in disguise. It turns out that behind Deleuze’s fascination with the multiple lurks, as a foil, a conception of the one. Badiou lists many passages in which Deleuze relates multiplicities to a transcendent notion of unity and oneness. There is a singularity to Deleuze’s notion of being, for example. Here Badiou argues that Deleuze’s philosophy is a ‘classical’ one, and this means that it is a “metaphysics

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: Le Clameur de l’être* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), 18, 26.

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 165–97.

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

of Being and of foundation".²⁰ This is even more true of Deleuze's other central category, borrowed from Henri Bergson: time. Time is the foundation of Deleuze's philosophy, that which guarantees that the world of wild differences can nevertheless yield a conception of truth. Badiou's bravura reading of Deleuze, counterintuitive as it might seem at first, is not to be dismissed out of hand even if it also betrays Badiou's own Platonist philosophy, which here manifests itself as a reinterpretation of one of Plato's greatest foes of the late twentieth century.

If anti-Platonism is one target for Badiou's approach, the other is language philosophy. Badiou recognizes the focus on language as one of the dominant strains within twentieth-century philosophy and one of the chief opponents of any kind of Platonism, especially insofar as it presumes that all thinking is determined by the medium of language (whether conceived as speech or as writing). Earlier philosophies had understood language to be one of the fields of philosophical inquiry among others, but language philosophy claims that since philosophy is crucially determined by language, all philosophy must become a philosophy of language.

For Badiou, the main problem with language philosophy is that it replaces the question of truth with that of meaning. Posed against a (Deleuzian) philosophy of the body and a (Wittgensteinian) philosophy of language, Badiou summarizes the cornerstones of his philosophy in his *Logics of Worlds* with the following formula: "there are only bodies and languages".²¹ Even as he thus recognizes, with this assertion, the achievements of a philosophy of the body and of language, Badiou supplements that assertion with a crucial addition: "There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths."²² The body-language doctrine, Badiou argues, can be traced back to the Sophists and their (relativistic) declaration that 'Man is the measure of all things'. Badiou understands truth to work against such anthropomorphic relativism. Truth is what takes the philosopher outside the human realm, indeed it 'dislocates', as Badiou puts it with respect to truth in the Republic.²³ At another moment he says that "truths exist as exceptions to what there is," as an interruption of the continuity of bodies and languages.²⁴

So far, Badiou's resuscitation of Plato takes place within the frame of the first paradigm of the cave: modern philosophy is anti-Platonist in that it has abandoned truth and thus the pos-

²⁰ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 83.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009 [2006]), 1; Martin Puchner, "Nothing but the Truths," *Bookforum*, April-May, 2009, 34.

²² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 4.

²³ Badiou, *Conditions*, 318.

²⁴ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 4.

sibility of the world above, contenting itself with the theater of shadows and words below. Only the most astute anti-Platonists, such as Deleuze, pay grudging homage to Plato by being not so much Platonists in reverse as Platonists in disguise. But it takes a reader such as Badiou to ferret out the Platonist overtones in the celebration of shadows, bodies and languages current in much twentieth-century philosophy.

Folded into this critique of anti-Platonism, however, we find Badiou availing himself of the second, dramatic paradigm, the understanding of philosophy as (dramatic) act. The key term here is 'event', which Badiou first developed in *Being and Event* and further elaborated in *Logics of Worlds* and several other texts.²⁵ For example, when, in the quote above, Badiou speaks of truth as an exception, he has in mind his definition of the event, which is always an exceptional occurrence. With the notion of the event, we arrive at the center of Badiou's ontology. Badiou offers us four routes towards the event: love, politics, mathematics and art. The second, politics, is perhaps the most intuitive, and also the one that reveals Badiou's political convictions: a history of true events is nothing other than the history of revolts and revolutions, beginning with Spartacus and ending with the Cultural Revolution in China. Here 'event' can be translated as 'revolutionary event'; periods of reaction, by contrast, are not events, but merely negative attempts to dilute the revolutionary effects of true events.

Among the four, mathematics is the most difficult, but also, for Badiou, the most crucial, philosophically speaking. Trained as a mathematician, Badiou has always sought to remind philosophy of its connection to mathematics. In this regard, too, Badiou follows Plato, who had identified mathematics as a stepping stone in the ascent from the cave to the realm of truth. Today's philosophy, for Badiou, has reversed Plato's preference for mathematics over poetry by installing poetry at the center of (Continental) language philosophy, most prominently so in the work of Heidegger (but also post-structuralism).²⁶ Badiou seeks to rectify this situation. From mathematics, Badiou takes his theory of multiples. Unlike Plato, with his insistence (at least in his middle period) on concrete universals, single ideas that are themselves sustained by the transcendent idea of the good, Badiou furnishes his worlds with multiples theorized with the help of Cantor's set theory. Here, the philosophical notion of the situation, which harbors multiples, finds its mathematical grounding, as does the argument why there are multiple worlds, not just one. Badiou's often technical use of mathematics has puzzled many readers (including this one), but for our purposes here suffice it to say that Badiou proposes an ontology of multiplicity that does without recourse to oneness and transcendence and remains instead on a plane of immanence.

²⁵ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Bloomsbury, 2013 [1998]).

²⁶ Badiou, *Conditions*, 163.

Even though Badiou seeks to install mathematics at the center of philosophy and thus to reverse the dominance of poetry – and literature more generally – over philosophy, he does not want to give up on literature altogether. Indeed, the poem remains another path towards the event. It is surprising how closely Badiou follows Heidegger's reverence for poetry, his belief that through poetry the true language of being takes place above and beyond the degraded language of communication and everyday life. But where Heidegger finds in poetry the language of being, Badiou finds there the occurrence of an event. What he shares with Heidegger is the presumption that in poetry something happens, that the language of poetry is somehow truer – more revelatory – than non-poetic language, which also means that language manifests itself more fully in the poem than in other forms of speech. Avoiding the quasi-religious language of revelation, however, Badiou thinks of the poem as an event, as the moment when 'what there is' is being interrupted, when something new and strange enters a situation and radically alters it: an exceptional poem bears traces of an event.

The contrast with Heidegger is visible most clearly in Badiou's choice of master poet: instead of the late Romantic Friedrich Hölderlin, Badiou reveres the modernists Stéphane Mallarmé and Samuel Beckett. Badiou's admiration for Mallarmé stems in part from the poet's own regard for numbers and from his quasi-technical understanding of poetry as an 'operation'.²⁷ The most important poem, for Badiou, is the experimental "A Throw of Dice," in which Mallarmé arranges words on a page reminiscent of falling dice. By deviating from the regular poetic line, Mallarmé turns every word into an event just as the poem itself revolves around an event: a shipwreck. But even more central is the event that gives the poem its name, the throw of dice itself. A throw of dice creates an event; it distills what we might call an event to its essence. When we throw dice, we have defined the situation, a bet, into which an event will intrude by making a decision. After the throw, nothing will be the same; the event will have fundamentally altered the situation. Not only does Mallarmé produce an event with and through his poem, he also does so, according to Badiou, by crucially relying on absence, negation and the void. The shipwreck, in that sense, is only the ruse of an external event, not its essence, which resides in a peculiar quality of absence. In Badiou's parlance, an event takes place 'on the edge of the void' in close proximity with nothing (the title of his main book, *Being and Event*, echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*). Badiou's ontology is not one of plenitude, but of a precarious relation to absence. Such absence is a recurring concern for Mallarmé, whose poems are fascinated by silence and, for the first time in modern poetry, by the blank space between the words. For Badiou, Mallarmé is thus the

²⁷ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 20.

poet of subtraction and isolation, the representative of a modernism that seeks to reduce mimesis and expression, the traditional domain of poetry, to a minimum.²⁸ The eccentric arrangement of words on the page in “A Throw of Dice” might indeed be seen as a poetic rendering of Badiou’s conception of multiples arranged on the edge of the void.

Situation, event, throw of dice – the terms of Badiou’s discussion of Mallarmé have one thing in common: they are at home in the theater. Even though Badiou, following Heidegger, discusses Mallarmé under the general rubric of the poem, the more important category is in fact drama. In *Being and Event* he emphasizes at the outset that “A Throw of Dice” is *dramatic* (his emphasis) and that Mallarmé more generally “is the thinker of the event-drama”.²⁹ In *A Handbook of Inaesthetics* he details more fully what kind of theater is at work in this extraordinary poet. Trying to specify what use Mallarmé makes of the theater, Badiou approaches a category that almost all philosophers interested in the theater encounter sooner or later: anti-theatricality. Mallarmé, the writer of the event-drama, as Badiou puts it, isn’t he really an enemy of the theater?

Badiou approaches this question via the rival category of dance as a metaphor for thought. Noting the frequent opposition between dance and theater, Badiou sees a clear anti-theatrical turn in the work of the later Nietzsche, who attacks Richard Wagner with an anti-theatrical polemic and praises instead, via the figure Zarathustra, the superiority of dance. Mallarmé, with his interest in dance, seems to go a similar route – but not quite. Mallarmé, for Badiou, parts company with Nietzsche in that he installs a peculiar, purified, idealized theater at the center of his dramatic poetry.

Badiou avoids a conception of theater as mimesis and reads Mallarmé’s monologue *The Afternoon of a Faun* as just such an anti-mimetic dramatization of the idea. This is another way of recognizing that Mallarmé has managed to install anti-theatricality at the center of his theater, creating an event drama in the manner of Plato, as I have detailed at greater length elsewhere.³⁰

Behind Badiou’s philosophy of the poem, we thus find a conception of Platonic theater. What are the contours of that conception? First of all, it asserts the centrality of the theater for thought. In *The Century*, Badiou observes that “the twentieth century is the century of the theatre as art,” the century that witnessed the emergence of the theater and of the *mise-en-scène* as high art. In particular, Badiou is interested in the figure of the director, who has

²⁸ Badiou, *Conditions*, 108.

²⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 191.

³⁰ Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

emerged as “a thinker of representation as such, who carries out a very complex investigation into the relationships between text, acting, space, and public”.³¹

Badiou places the modern director at the center of theater because he wants to formulate an understanding of theater that emphasizes its connection to philosophy, or more precisely, to thought. The director, as he specifies in another short text on theater, assembles components, including text, acting, set design and music, but assembles them in a unique manner; this is why the theater can be called an event. The theatrical assemblage occurs only in the present, night after night, there, on the stage. Further, Badiou argues that due to this unique form of assemblage, the theater is capable of producing ideas. “This event – when it really is theater, the art of the theater – is an event of thought. This means that the assemblage of components directly produces ideas.”³² Since philosophical truth has the character of the event, it is the theater, the most eventful of the arts, that plays a central role in its formulation.

Badiou’s most important text on theater to date is *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, published in 1990. As editor of *Theatre Survey*, I commissioned a translation of this short book into English; it appeared in its entirety in the autumn 2008 issue of *Theatre Survey* and can be accessed via *Cambridge Journals Online*.³³ It is in this book that Badiou spells out the theatrical dimension of his thought, and sums up his understanding of theater in the thesis that “All theatre is theatre of ideas”.³⁴ Badiou here does not mean that theater fulfills merely a kind of pedagogical assumption, “distancing the Idea in the veil of representation”.³⁵ Rather, it means returning theater to a Platonist conception of the idea, albeit an idea understood as event and therefore as something that must be understood dramatically.

Badiou’s conception of theater as event also identifies the theater as the most political art form, the art form most closely tied to the state. This, of course, is especially true in France, with its tradition of national theater and generous state subsidies. Things could not be more different in the United States. But even if we allow for national difference, the essential relation between theater and the state posited by Badiou has a relevance for us as well, since it identifies the assembled public, the liveness of the theater event and the history of theater as crucial political categories. (Here and elsewhere Badiou contrasts the political nature of live theater with film, which cannot be political in the same way, and this preference for theater

³¹ Alain Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), 40.

³² Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 72.

³³ Alain Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” trans. Bruno Bosteels, *Theatre Survey* 49.2 (November 2008): 187-238.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

over film might be seen as yet another contrast with Deleuze, whose earlier interest in theater had given way to an engagement with film.) In order to preserve this character of the live assembly, Badiou also demands that theaters keep the practice of intermission, the moment when the audience can see and experience itself as audience rather than disappear, as it does in film, in the anonymity of the dark.

We can now see the contours of Badiou's theatrical philosophy. The poem is for him an 'event-drama', and this emphasis on the event ultimately leads him to think of the theater as the art form – or assemblage of existing art forms – that is the most directly tied to ideas. Like many theatrical philosophers before him, including Plato, Marsilio Ficino, Denis Diderot, Voltaire, Søren Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Sartre, Badiou also translated his dramatic philosophy into drama. Only recently have his plays begun appearing in English, despite having already acquired a (small) following in France. They are wide-ranging and witty, turning philosophical concepts into scenes and characters, including the figure of Ahmed, an Algerian immigrant around whom four of Badiou's plays revolve.³⁶ These plays also testify to the fact that Badiou's philosophy is not only dramatic, but actually veers towards drama itself. Badiou's work is an occasion for rethinking the relation between philosophy and theater; it is also itself an exemplar of this relation, a reminder of how fruitful the encounter between theater and philosophy can be.

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³⁶ See Alain Badiou, *Ahmed the Philosopher*, trans. Joseph Litvak (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

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"Unutterable Utterances" and "Mysterious Naming"

Nomination in Badiou and the Theater of Mysticism

Daniel Whistler

Hail in the name of those who seek the name for your endurance.

Mokhtar in Alain Badiou, *The Incident at Antioch*

A truth begins to dawn on the horizon.

The Stranger in August Strindberg, *The Road to Damascus*

Part One: A Mystic-without-Mysticism

Act One of the *The Incident at Antioch* takes place on the road to Damascus, and its action revolves around one moment of ecstatic illumination: the protagonist, Paula, "fall[s] to the ground, arms outstretched,"¹ unconsciously imitating Caravaggio's *The Road to Damascus* in

¹ Alain Badiou, *The Incident at Antioch*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 27.



which St. Paul falls from a horse, arms outstretched, in an ecstatic fit of divine revelation.² Paula is, in this moment of "feverish exaltation," "a young woman experiencing the joys of the new," thinking and speaking from a "place out of place" (a Badiouian utopia).³ Moreover, Paula's words here become simultaneously cryptic and full of meaning: "The pebbles in my mouth are giving way to clear words".⁴ The "transparency" to which she ecstatically refers is linguistic as well as cognitive, and, as such, the words themselves – as spoken on the stage – bring forth an excess of meaning, an excess faithful to Paula's experience of a new truth, but cryptic to her audience.⁵ She speaks in, what Badiou will call in *Saint Paul*, "unutterable utterances".⁶

On the basis of the above, it seems safe to venture that Paula's actions and words repeat many of the traditional patterns of religious mysticism: momentary ecstasy, a fit-like state, cryptic transparency and blinding obscurity. Paula would fit snugly into the pages of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. A convenient point of comparison – one I expand upon throughout what follows – is August Strindberg's *The Road to Damascus* trilogy, which provides a more traditionally mystical re-enactment of this moment of Pauline ecstasy. The protagonist of these plays, The Stranger, is similarly prone to mystic fits in which his language becomes both clear and obscure as he feels himself reborn; for instance,

The clouds have now lifted, the sky opened, the wind is warm, feel as it caresses us. This is what I call living; yes, now I live, now more than ever, and I feel myself grow, extend outwards, dilute, vanish into infinity; I am everywhere, in the sea which is my blood, in the rocks which are my bones, in the trees, in the flowers; my head knocks against the sky and I contemplate the universe in which I am mixed up, and I feel in me the force of the Creator, for I am that Creator.⁷

Again, this speech consists in "pure and beautiful enigmas" or "unutterable utterances"; there is little, I venture, at the level of rhetoric and pragmatics that could distinguish The

² On Badiou's use of Caravaggio, see the notes to Badiou, *Antioch*, 127.

³ Badiou, *Antioch*, 29, 31, 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶ This renewal of language is a continual theme in the early scenes of the play, see *Antioch*, 19, 31.

⁷ *The Road to Damascus* has yet to receive a critical edition in English (for an older translation, see August Strindberg, *The Road to Damascus*, trans. Graham Rawson [London: Jonathan Cape, 1939]); for this reason, citations and translations are taken from the critical French edition: August Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, in *Théâtre complet*, vol. 3, trans. TAGE Aurell et al. (Paris: L'Arche, 1983), 147-360.

Stranger's speech from Paula's.⁸

Paula's mysticism is acknowledged within *The Incident at Antioch*, but, crucially, at the very same time, it is also denied. Thus, as Paula undergoes her "ecstatic revelation,"⁹ Mokhtar comments on her as "Like one fallen spread-eagled under the light, but it's not God speaking to her. For it's giving up those trappings that's knocking her down and making her spring back up to achieve the precision of an axiom."¹⁰ Paula is a mystic-without-mysticism: one that performs "an immanent break",¹¹ rather than submission to a truth from above. As Badiou insists throughout his work, "Truth is a process, and not an illumination".¹² While Paula is mystic-like, a radical difference separates her from religious mystics. And it is this play of similarities and radical difference that I wish to explore further in this paper, with particular emphasis on strategies of naming.

There is, of course, a simple way to distinguish Paula from The Stranger using the resources of Badiou's own philosophy – by means of the category of the obscure subject outlined in *Logics of Worlds*. I will return to this at length in Part Three; however, one example will illustrate my point. Badiou's description of the obscure subjects of love vividly recalls the tormented relationship of The Stranger and The Lady in Strindberg's *The Road to Damascus*. They fully fit Badiou's classification: they renounce the event in the name of a transcendent, atemporal fetish and a life governed by destiny, and do so by means of "a deadly possessive reciprocity" that "turns the enchanted present into night".¹³ As one character remarks in Strindberg's play, "they torment each other in order to finally arrive at reconciliation with God".¹⁴ However, this may distinguish the subject-positions of Strindberg's mystics from Badiou's militants, but not the names they use or the language they speak. What I am interested in, on the contrary, is the criteria immanent to language itself for differentiating Paula from The Stranger, i.e. how to distinguish the linguistic practices of mysticism from those of the mystic-without-mysticism. In other words, the theory of the obscure subject is insufficient for my purposes; more investigation is required.

To put the above another way: Badiou's own philosophy approaches mysticism in his the-

⁸ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 303.

⁹ Kenneth Reinhard, "Introduction," in Badiou, *Antioch*, xliii.

¹⁰ Badiou, *Antioch*, 31.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 42.

¹² Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 15.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 74.

¹⁴ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 186.

ory of the supernumerary name. Hence, Paula's language of excessive transparency, which "pull[s] names away from the usage that prostitutes them," illustrates particularly clearly the extent of the closeness between Badiou's practices of naming and those of traditional mystics, precisely because it enacts Badiou's own 'mysterious' doctrine.¹⁵ That is, *The Incident at Antioch's* emphasis on the illegal and anonymous nature of the name that announces the event to the audience is to be identified with that very doctrine of the supernumerary name in Badiou's philosophy that is subsequently jettisoned in *Logic of Worlds* precisely because it is too 'mysterious'. Badiou, by his own admission, is too much of a mystic when he invokes a name that comes from nowhere, that means both nothing and too much and that gives birth to an ecstatic subject. This is why Badiou's philosophy of the name in *Being and Event* will act as my starting-point; it is here that one finds, implicitly dramatized, the mysticism that is constantly being abjected from Badiou's system.

The guiding thread throughout this paper, as we have seen, is the road to Damascus itself in Badiou's depiction of Paul and Paula and August Strindberg's trilogy. Whether Saul actually became Paul or not at the moment of ecstatic conversion, this moment of illumination traditionally has been taken as a site of baptism: of new names and new languages. The road to Damascus is an evental site of nomination in all its configurations (mystical, theological, theatrical and philosophical) – and it is for this reason that I deploy it in what follows to trace the similarities and differences in how Badiou and Strindberg conceive of "the power of names".¹⁶ To this end, Part Two provides a typology of different naming practices in Badiou, the philosophy of theater and Strindberg's mysticism, respectively, before, in Part Three, I pursue in more detail a direct contrast between Badiouian and Strindbergian nomination, thereby building up a more detailed picture of the ways in which Badiou and the mystic theorize and practice nomination.

Part Two: The Power of Names

1.1 Badiouian Names

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou confesses to the problematic mysticism inherent in his earlier theory of naming:

¹⁵ Badiou, *Ethics*, 40.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 372.

Perspicacious readers (namely Desanti, Deleuze, Nancy and Lyotard) quickly brought to my notice that I was framing the ontological definition of 'what happens' both from below and from above. From below, by positing the existence, required by every event, of an event-site, whose formal structure I rather laboriously delineated. From above, by demanding that every event receive a name. One could then say, on the one hand, that there was in fact a 'worldly' structure of the event (its site, summoning the void of every situation), and on the other, a rather unclear transcendental structure (the name, attributed by an anonymous subject). As we shall see, I am now able fundamentally to equate 'site' and 'evental multiplicity' – thus avoiding all the banal aporias of the dialectic between structure and historicity – and that I do so without any recourse to a mysterious naming.¹⁷

While the definition of 'what happens' from below is retained in *Logics of Worlds* – albeit seriously modified – the "mysterious [...] transcendental structure" in which a supernumerary name is "attributed by an anonymous subject" is completely jettisoned. Badiou is even clearer in his Preface to the English translation of *Ethics*:

Today I can no longer maintain that the only trace left by an event in the situation it affects is the name given to that event. This idea presumed, in effect, that there were two events rather than one (the event-event and the event-naming), and likewise two subjects rather than one (the subject who names the event, and the subject who is faithful to this naming).¹⁸

In short, after *Being and Event*, the theory of the supernumerary name is disposed of, and with it the doubled-event and doubled-subject. For such a theory is too 'mysterious'. It is here then that Badiou flirts most with the mystic: mystery exists in Badiou's system to be abjected. And so, since what he abjects brings him closest to mysticism, it is here in the discarded trash from *Being and Event* that we will find a way in to the delineation of the figure of the mystic-without-mysticism outlined in the Introduction.

To briefly sketch supernumerary nomination: *Being and Event* orients itself around the 'fundamental' thesis: "there is some newness in being," and such newness (a truth) is recognized by means of an intervention, "naming that 'there is'": "The initial operation of an inter-

¹⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 361.

¹⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, lvi.

vention is to make a name out of an unrepresented element of the site to qualify the event".¹⁹ In fact, Badiou goes further still: as *Ethics* makes clear, this act of recognition-through-naming is not posterior, accidental nor even inessential to the event, rather it is to be identified with the being of the event itself: "The fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to *name*, the situated void of that for which it is an event".²⁰ Such nomination gives rise to a militant subject, one with "another mode of discernment [...] which, outside knowledge but within the effect of an interventional nomination, explores the connections to the supernumerary name of the event." The subject consists in an incessant fidelity to the originary naming by which the event is recognized; hence, both the event and the subject exist within (and themselves exude) a "nominal aura".²¹

The name itself has two properties: it is illegal and anonymous. It is illegal because, in the set of existing knowledge that constitutes the state of the world prior to the advent of the new (i.e. that knowledge which "measures being to language such as it is", according to the names that already exist), there is no rule or index that might indicate the meaning of the supernumerary name. There is "nothing in the situation, no rule whatsoever, [that] authorizes [the name's] distinction from any other." Intervening nomination is thus illegal. Moreover, the name is anonymous since "the name drawn from the void is indistinguishable precisely because it is drawn from the void". Or, as Badiou puts it more fully,

Knowledge does not know of the event because the name of the event is supernumerary, and so it does not belong to the language of the situation. When I say that it does not belong to the latter, this is not necessarily in a material sense whereby the name would be barbarous, incomprehensible or non-listed. What qualifies the name or event is that it is drawn from the void [...] Even if the name of the event is very simple, and it is definitely listed in the language of the situation, it is supernumerary as *name of the event* [...] and it is foreclosed from knowledge.²²

The name is new – not in the material sense of being a new combination of letters or syllables – but as a signifying occurrence. And this novelty of meaning (that bears witness to but also partially constitutes a truth) comes out of nowhere: it is a new name which no one can understand, interpret or decipher on the basis of what has come before. From this perspective,

¹⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 203-4.

²⁰ Badiou, *Ethics*, 69 (emphasis mine).

²¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 329, 398.

²² *Ibid.*, 513, 206, 513, 329.

intervention constitutes “a language of the unnameable”.²³ In other words, “the very secret of intervention” resides in the fact that “legitimate nomination is impossible”.²⁴ This name subtracts from all others through an operation of hyper-asceticism;²⁵ it bores an “unreasonable hole within the tissue of language”.²⁶ It is excessive: “a name in excess”.²⁷

The event is therefore partially constituted (and simultaneously recognized) through this name both excessive and empty, both indiscernible and making all the difference. Thus, early Badiouianism glorifies a language in which “*solely* the production of a supernumerary name initiates the thought of the indiscernible”²⁸ or “the *only* trace left by an event in the situation it affects is the name given to that event”.²⁹ In the end, what matters most is the *name*: truth and novelty are accessed, thought and experienced *solely* by means of a name that means both nothing and too much.

1.2 Dramatic Names

“Every name from which a truth proceeds is a name from before the Tower of Babel. But it has to circulate in the tower.”³⁰ It is in this way that Badiou glosses Philippians II.1 at the end of *Saint Paul*, and here, in this admittedly late text, we can still hear the reverberations of the doctrine of the supernumerary name. The name bores a hole in the confusions and dispersions of already existing nominations to give rise to a linguistic state that is simultaneously fuller and emptier, one that repeats the fullness and emptiness of all origins. The eventual name is untimely (an issue to which I return at length at the end of the paper), a primal word in the midst of contemporary jargon.

And here once more, of course, Badiou touches on mystic motifs, particularly the Adamicism that dominates much modern mystic thinking about language, whether the *Logosmystik* of Böhme or the pasigraphy of Wilkins. Even more significant for my present purposes, moreover, is that this appeal to primal, uncorrupted names informs a tradition of philosophizing *about theater* too. One of the *Urdokumente* of modern philosophy of theater, Gotthold

²³ Badiou, *Ethics*, 376.

²⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 289.

²⁵ See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 311.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

²⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, 394.

²⁸ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 319 (emphasis mine).

²⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 361 (emphasis mine).

³⁰ Badiou, *St. Paul*, 110.

Lessing's 1769 *Letter to Nicolai*, reflects on dramatic language in this precise context.³¹ For Lessing, the theater perfects language by transforming its arbitrary and mutable signs into originary and true names. A brief discussion of Lessing's claim will therefore bring out more clearly the binding together of the three terms at stake in this paper: mystic names, Badiouianism and the theater. Of course, it needs to be continually emphasized that in no way can or should Badiou's theory of names be reduced to this mystic Adamicism; yet, hopefully sufficient evidence has been adduced as to their closeness as to make this juxtaposition of the Badiouian description of the name of a truth with the theatrical search for a true name appear fruitful.

In the late eighteenth-century context in which Lessing writes, such Adamic language – the language of true names – was identified with 'natural signs', pre-Babelian remnants that truly name their referent by means of a substantial ontological connection. In Mendelssohn's definition, signs "are natural if the combination of the sign with the subject matter is grounded in the very properties of what is designated."³² Traces of this utopic grounding relation remain scattered among post-Babelian languages in onomatopoeia, metaphor and algebraic symbolism, and, just as in Paula's ecstatic speeches in *The Incident at Antioch*, are to be recognized by a kind of transparency that exceeds our control – "perspicuity without exertion," in Mendelssohn's terms.³³

According to Lessing, therefore, the task of the playwright is to "endeavour absolutely to elevate arbitrary signs into natural ones." That is, the playwright must aim to recover pre-Babelian names and circulate them in the tower. Lessing envisages such a task as follows,

Poetry must endeavour to absolutely elevate its arbitrary signs into natural ones [...] The means it employs to do this are tone, choice of words, arrangement of words, metre, figures of speech, tropes, metaphors, and so forth. All these things cause the arbitrary signs to approximate more closely to the natural, but they do not make them natural signs; consequently all the kinds of poetry that employ only these means are to be regarded as the lower kinds of poetry, and the highest kind of poetry is the one that turns the arbitrary

³¹ G.E. Lessing, "Letter to Nicolai, 26 May 1769," trans. Joyce P. Crick, in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Wincklemann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, ed. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 134-6.

³² Moses Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178.

³³ *Ibid.*, 255, 273.

signs wholly into natural signs. Now that is dramatic poetry, for in drama the words cease to be arbitrary signs, and become the *natural* signs of arbitrary things.³⁴

In drama, talk is brought to life and made present on the stage, so that, in David Wellbery's words, "the speech itself is an action [...] sign and object are not only similar, but coincide". Wellbery continues,

Only in dramatic poetry does the poet's language function as a natural sign and therefore only in the drama does poetry achieve its ideal. As performative speech, the poem is the very reality it designates, for this reality itself is the activity of speaking [...] Perfected mimesis is not the imitation of an object or action, it is the action itself.³⁵

The natural sign is only really possible in the fusion of sign and referent; in performance, the sign embodies what it refers to and thus meaning shines perfectly from it. Meaning is excessively present in the drama; it does not lie elsewhere. In other words, the performative nature of theater results in true names, according to Lessing. The stage acts as a portal transporting signs back to their archaic state. Watching a play thereby becomes a kind of mystical experience, a belated repetition of Adam's acts of naming described in Genesis 2.

1.3 Mystic Names

Strindberg's post-*Inferno* dramatic work stands in continuity with this tradition. He too conceives of the dramatic endeavor as a means of overcoming post-Babelian confusion. Thus, in *The Road to Damascus II*, The Stranger tells the story of Babel as presented in the *Zohar* in which maleficent demons constructed the tower to "confound language as well as reason" for they feared man's capacity for knowledge. He continues,

Since that time the powers have reigned by means of discord [so that now] if some mortal is able to penetrate the secrets of the powers, no one will believe him and he will be marked with madness [...]. Only the mad are reasonable, for they see, hear and sense what escapes their eyes, ears and heart,

³⁴ Lessing, "Letter to Nicolai, 26 May 1769," 134.

³⁵ David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoön: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 225, 227.

but they cannot communicate their experiences to others.³⁶

The Stranger, though, wishes to confound the demons in return, overcome Babelian confusion, and attain a purer language:

I must create a double: adjoin to my own personality that of another being who can absorb in him everything that enchains my spirit. So that my soul can find once more the purer, hotter atmosphere which will impel it still higher towards the ether, so that, transcending the Dominations, it will go up to the throne of God and place at the feet of the Eternal the woes of humankind.³⁷

This is a programmatic statement for Strindberg's late dramatic art: ascent through catharsis. By creating a sacrificial double for himself on the stage, Strindberg attempts to purify his thinking and his words. A discussion from *The Road to Damascus* I illuminates this process further:

The Mother: Why do you call Ingeborg 'Eve'?

The Stranger: By giving her a name myself, I made her mine, and I intend to transform her completely according to my will.

The Mother: So that she resembles you! (She laughs.) I've heard of sorcerers from the village who sometimes create a mannequin representing someone on whom they wish to cast a spell and they baptise it with the name of the man they have decided to strike down. Likewise, in the person of this Eve who would be your work you have tried to damn her entire race.³⁸

I will return to the specifics of this baptism later in the section; for now, what is crucial is the link here established between nomination and the creation of an abject theatrical double, "a mannequin". A central component of the mystic ascent is the ability to name correctly.³⁹ Thus, once again, the problematic of the true name is at stake; indeed, Strindberg draws on a

³⁶ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 244.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁹ Maeterlinck's influence looms large here, particularly the mystic names that structure *The Blue Bird*. See Henry Rose, *Maeterlinck's Symbolism* (New York: Dodd, 1911).

plethora of naming strategies in his plays to achieve his goals of purification and ascent. In what follows, I focus on two of them to give some indication of how Strindberg perpetuates the project of undoing the curse of Babel.



The determining influence on almost all late-modern language-mysticism is Emanuel Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences – and Strindberg is no exception. It was on March 29, 1896, Palm Sunday, that Strindberg first discovered Swedenborg:

I came to a stop in front of a row of Balzac's novels bound in blue, picked up his *Séraphita* quite by chance [...] When I got home I opened the book, which was practically unknown to me, as so many years had passed since I first read it. Now, with a mind prepared to receive it, I devoured the contents of this remarkable work as if it were something entirely new. In my homeland and his, Swedenborg was regarded as a charlatan, a madman with a distorted and lewd imagination. I had never read a word he had written, and I was now carried away by admiration for this angelic giant of the last century, interpreted as he was here by the most profound of French geniuses [...] So it was that Swedenborg came into my life, in which has played an immense part. He came on the actual anniversary of his death, bringing me the palms of victory or of martyrdom.⁴⁰

Swedenborg was to become "a guardian angel", for in his writings were to be found, according to Strindberg, "the answer to the principal riddles of our spiritual life".⁴¹

Swedenborg's founding statement of the doctrine of correspondences occurs in *Heaven and Hell*:

The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, and not merely the natural world in general, but also every particular of it; and as a consequence everything in the natural world that springs from the spiritual world is called a correspondent. It must be understood that the natural world springs from and has permanent existence from the spiritual world, precisely like an effect from its effecting cause [...] From this is the correspondence.⁴²

⁴⁰ August Strindberg, *Inferno*, trans. Mary Sandbach (London: Penguin, 1979), 144-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 210, 215.

⁴² Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell: Drawn from Things Heard and Seen*, trans. George F. Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), §89, §96.

In such passages, Swedenborg rehashes the traditional *analogia ordonis* in which, because the effect resembles its cause but at a far lower degree of reality, the name of the effect provides a means of understanding the nature of the cause, even if a radically inadequate one. Swedenborg speaks very much in this tradition, when he distinguishes between "a literal sense [...] and a spiritual sense in the Word".⁴³ And yet Swedenborg – almost despite himself – goes beyond this: for, to angels, mystics and humans before Babel, the name of the effect is *equally* the name of the cause: neither is merely inadequately predicated. Thus, "at the present day no one can know the spiritual things in heaven to which the natural things in the world correspond except from heaven",⁴⁴ yet, "the most ancient people, who were celestial men, thought from correspondence itself, as the angels do".⁴⁵ That is, for these angels and "ancient peoples" (as well as for other "celestial men" like Swedenborg himself), the earthly and heavenly senses of a name are *co-primary*: both lay claim to literal truth. There are multiple literal meanings bound to each sign. And the role of the mystic is to become once more an angelic, pre-Babelian subject by affirming the excessive truths that each name carries. The mystic subject must bear witness to dual, literal meanings in singular names.

Strindberg reconceives the doctrine of correspondences in a more tortured form.⁴⁶ The subject must bear the agonizing sense-contradictions enfolded into a name. The multiple truths signified by the subject's own name, for instance, ruptures one's harmonious unity in the name of a duplicitous existence. The very end of *The Road to Damascus* trilogy, in which The Stranger, having ascended to the mystic retreat of the White House, is shown around the Hall of Paintings, illuminates this property of the mystic name particularly clearly.

Just as, in the programmatic statement rehearsed above, the creator purges himself of contradiction in a dramatic double who performs him, so too here the monks of the White House are able to achieve self-identity at the expense of those they artistically depict – the two-headed great men of history. While the monks "have only one head," all their painted subjects "have at least two". In this way, Father Clement has painted Luther double-headed as "the young champion of tolerance, the old champion of intolerance"⁴⁷ and similarly Vol-

⁴³ Ibid., §114.

⁴⁴ Ibid., §110.

⁴⁵ Ibid., §87. See also §114.

⁴⁶ For Strindberg's explicit, theoretical engagement with correspondences, see August Strindberg, *Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Michael Robinson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178. On Strindberg's use of Swedenborg to reconstruct Adamic language, see Michael Meyer, *Strindberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 546.

⁴⁷ See also the comments on Luther's duplicity in "The Mysticism of World History" (in Strindberg, *Selected Essays*, 198).

taire, "the atheist who spent his life defending God". Of the painting of F.L. Stolberg, it is said he, "Wrote a fanatical book in defence of Protestantism and poof! Is converted to Catholicism [...] A miracle, maybe? A little Road to Damascus without a doubt?"⁴⁸ And here we glimpse some of the significance of Strindberg's conception of the road to Damascus for a theory of nomination: the Damascus-illumination is the moment where the inconsistent senses of the name are at their most severe, the moment of acute contradiction which causes the most suffering to the name-bearer "falling to the ground, arms outstretched". Ecstatic illumination and the unbearable duplicity of names here coincide, making possible the subsequent ascent towards which Strindberg's drama is directed.

Moreover, according to Strindberg, there has been one exemplary subject who most fully embraced nominal duplicity and reveled in the proliferation of senses felt at these Damascus-moments: Napoleon.⁴⁹ He writes,

Napoleon! Created by the Revolution! Emperor of the people, Nero of liberty, tyrant of equality, 'venerable brother' of fraternity. He is the most astute of all these two-headed people, for he could laugh at himself, raise himself above his inconsistencies, take on a new skin, change his soul and with each metamorphosis feel truly like a new incarnation with perfect conviction.⁵⁰

Napoleon self-consciously creates new meanings for his life, revels in their multiplicity under a single name; he joyfully suffers the acute contradictions of his name, transforming them into moments of liberation. Napoleon is that Christic double or mannequin who happily takes on himself all the pain of nominal inconsistency to make possible Strindberg's own mystic ascent.

⁴⁸ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 356, 354, 354, 356, 357.

⁴⁹ Strindberg elsewhere considers himself the reincarnation (or at least, repetition) of Napoleon. See Strindberg, *Inferno*, 225.

⁵⁰ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 356. Kierkegaard is directly compared to Napoleon in this regard: "There is only one man one could compare with this – the Dane Kierkegaard. He had, from the beginning, a consciousness of this pathogenesis of the soul, this power of giving birth from this life without fertilisation, like a tree sprouting from a shoot. It is for this reason, and also because he would not allow himself to be duped by life, that he wrote under a series of pseudonyms, each representing 'a stage on life's way'" (ibid., 356-7). However, notice how Kierkegaard's strategy towards nomination is slightly different: instead of bearing multiplicity in one name, he multiplies names in his pseudonyms. He thus synthesizes the two naming strategies discussed in this section.



We have already read of the role Balzac's *Séraphita* played in bringing Strindberg to Swedenborg on Palm Sunday 1896. However, the significance of *Séraphita* in its own right for Strindberg's naming practices should not be overlooked. From that day in 1896, "*Séraphita* became my gospel,"⁵¹ and its own fictional performance of Swedenborg's doctrines became paradigmatic for Strindberg's own attempts in his late drama.⁵²

Balzac's novel aims at re-presenting the essence of Swedenborgian doctrine, yet it ends up an unorthodox repetition. For, while he acknowledges the importance of the doctrine of correspondences "by which the world is placed in unison with heaven,"⁵³ Balzac is rarely concerned in *Séraphita* with the multiple literal senses of each name, but rather the reverse: multiple names for one referent. Names proliferate around (in this case) a person, cumulatively aggregating meaning by means of this process of accumulation.⁵⁴

As one character muses, the word may forever try to constrain nature, but nature always exceeds the word; however, at the same time, words "carry [nature] up to a third, a ninth or a twenty-seventh power [...] obtain[ing] magical results by constraining the processes of nature". Language strives ever onwards to capture the world – and thus will always proliferate names – but in so doing, it potentiates and intensifies the world by means of "a mysterious optic which increases, or diminishes, or exalts creation". Names "act upon [us] at times like the torpedo which electrifies or paralyses the fisherman, at other times like a dose of phosphorus which stimulates life and accelerates its propulsion". The names of Seraphita/Seraphitus is where this idea of potentiation through proliferation is most evident: Seraphita/Seraphitus bears this dual name as a reflection of his/her Adamic androgyny. Again, the project of undoing the curse of Babel lurks in the background: Seraphita/Seraphitus cannot be given one proper name in a post-Babelian era of linguistic dispersion and confusion. It is for this reason that at his/her birth, his/her father (acting as an avatar of Swedenborg) proclaims, "Our child is to be without name on this earth. You must not baptise in the waters of an earthly Church one who has just been immersed in the fires of Heaven." Hence, only a series of names can approximate. Not until the end of the novel do the characters even begin to acknowledge the plurality of Seraphita's/Seraphitus' names and start their own ascent up-

⁵¹ Strindberg, *Inferno*, 145.

⁵² On Strindberg and Balzac, see Meyer, *Strindberg*, 337-8.

⁵³ Honoré de Balzac, *Séraphita*, trans. K.P. Wormeley (Boston: Roberts, 1889), 51.

⁵⁴ I have explored this practice in more detail in Daniel Whistler, "Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the 'Spinoza Effect'," *Speculations* 3 (2012): 99-134.

wards but also backwards towards an Edenic state. At this point,

Wilfred and Minna were enabled to understand some of the mysterious sayings of Him who had appeared on earth in the form of which to each of them had rendered him comprehensible – to one Seraphitus, to the other Seraphita – for they saw that all was homogenous in the sphere where he now was.⁵⁵

That is, the other characters here begin an apprenticeship in an archaic language of true names, “a language as superior to thought as thought is to instinct”⁵⁶ – that is, the language of correspondences. Such a language annuls the multiplicity of names that circulate after Babel, and – in orthodox Swedenborgian fashion – rediscover the correspondent names that signify multiple truths.

The Road to Damascus is also a drama of multiple nominations. The Stranger is a protagonist in search of a name, and throughout the trilogy tries on various appellations (Caesar, Adam, Cain, Christ).⁵⁷ Through this proliferating series which parallels trials of purification and redemption, he gradually ascends to the White House to enter a death-like state of beatific stasis, and it is here he receives his final, true name:

Finally you will be resurrected among the dead, you will abandon your former name and we will baptise you like a small child. What name shall we give you? [...] I see that John has been written. Brother John.⁵⁸

Having finally been baptized, The Stranger can now ‘rest in peace’, as the final words of the trilogy put it.⁵⁹ *The Road to Damascus*, then, is a road leading from nominal proliferation and dispersion to the Edenic state of a single, meaningful name.

It is not just The Stranger, however, who undergoes name-changes, so too The Lady. Nameless at the opening of *The Road to Damascus* I, The Stranger becomes Adam in bestowing upon her one true name:

It’s strange: I love to see you in my thoughts without personality, without name. I only half

⁵⁵ Balzac, *Seraphita*, 33, 34, 58, 104, 127.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁷ See, respectively, Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 195, 188, 267, 215.

⁵⁸ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 359.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 360.

know what you are called; in fact, I'd love to give you a name myself. Let's see, what can I call you? Yes, I'll call you Eve.⁶⁰

We learn later that Eve is also named Ingeborg, and indeed at the end of the trilogy, once the salvific White House is almost reached, "on the other side of the river, with life below us, behind us," The Stranger calls her Ingeborg for the first time, adding, "I have never met Ingeborg until now, never known her until now."⁶¹

Nevertheless, it is The Lady's initial baptism as Eve that will prove most significant for the rest of my paper, precisely because of its Badiouian resonances (even if it is a firmly non-Badiouian act of nomination). The Lady receives the name 'Eve' from an anonymous, nameless source in an encounter with a loved one. The trilogy as a whole follows The Lady and The Stranger's struggles to stay faithful to this defining event; it drives the plot and fills out their characters. As The Stranger puts it, "Life, which before was only a vast absurdity, has now taken on a meaning, and I make out an intention where before there was only chance." Moreover, 'Eve' is a name that at the moment of nomination means nothing to either The Stranger or The Lady, standing outside the Christian redemption story as they do at that point. Only later does the name retrospectively begin to be filled with meaning, in light of the consequences of the initial event and a realization of their part in the redemption narrative. The Lady thus reveals in hindsight, "It seems to me that I have tasted from the Tree of Knowledge, my eyes have been opened and now I can distinguish good from evil [...] I see now why I had to call myself Eve." Out of the "darkness" of "this long road to Damascus," new subjects are born – subjects faithful to an initial act of nomination by a nameless voice. In The Stranger's words,

Where am I? Where have I been? Is it winter, summer or spring? What century am I in? And what region of the world? Am I young or old? Man or woman? Am I a god or a devil? [...] Silence, I've just made a leap in time of thousands of years, and I am beginning to distil myself, to reassemble myself, to crystallise myself! A little patience and, soon, for the second time I will have been created and, bursting out from the dark waters of creation, the lotus flower will extend its head towards the sun to say: it is I!⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁶¹ Ibid., 307, 333. In fact, he first calls her Ingeborg a few pages earlier in similar circumstances (307).

⁶² Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 153, 197, 337, 277-8.

Part Three: The Future of Names

2.1 The Road to Damascus 1: The Theory of Discourses

In the previous part, I juxtaposed Badiou's naming of the true with dramatic true names in order to provide some idea of the rough similarities that might pertain between the two. Thus, Strindberg, like Badiou, structures his drama around names that are simultaneously empty and excessive, that are given forth anonymously, that recognize that something new has occurred, and that generate subjects faithful to that novelty. In this second part of the essay, I want to try to define more exactly the difference separating the two – that is, to return to the terms of the Introduction, to specify why Badiou's Paula remains a mystic-without-mysticism irreducible to the ecstatic illumination experienced by Strindberg's characters.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the simplest means of distinguishing the two in Badiouian terms is with respect to the category of the obscure subject from *Logics of Worlds*. A mystic subject is an obscure subject, for it "systematically resorts to the invocation of a full and pure transcendent Body, an ahistorical or anti-evental body (City, God, Race...) from which it follows that the trace [of the event] will be denied." This recourse to an atemporal, pure presence allows for an ascent away from the new in the name of silent devotion to the obscure. The mystic forces "the descent of [the evental] present into the night of non-exposition," or, as Badiou puts it more fully,

The obscure subject offers the chance of a new destiny, under the incomprehensible but salvific sign of an absolute body, whose only demand is that one serves it by nurturing everywhere and at all times the hatred of every living thought, every transparent language and every uncertain becoming.⁶³

The obscure subject works in signs and ciphers, desires an atemporal release from the present and finds destiny in transcendence. The obscure subject erases truths by means of divine names, rather than naming the truths themselves.

Such obscurantism is evidently present throughout Strindberg's *The Road to Damascus*: the present is benighted, under the sway of maleficent powers⁶⁴ who communicate their existence through half-hidden signs.⁶⁵ Temporal life takes place under the curse of Deuterono-

⁶³ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 59, 59, 61.

⁶⁴ See Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 235.

⁶⁵ For example, The Stranger exclaims, "I do not know whether it is someone else or myself whose

my 28: "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field [...] [etc.]." An exchange between The Stranger and his mother-in-law illustrates this gradual emergence of an obscure subject through the play particularly clear:

The Mother: You still doubt?
 The Stranger: Yes, many things. But a truth begins to dawn on the horizon.
 The Mother: What truth?
 The Stranger: That there exists [...] things and [...] forces in which I did not believe until now.
 The Mother: Have you noticed also that it is neither you nor any other human being who guides your extraordinary destiny?
 The Stranger: That is what I thought I noticed.
 The Mother: Then you have travelled a part of the path.⁶⁶

There is a quasi-Badiouian moment here when "a truth begins to dawn," but it is immediately covered over: any sense of novelty or eventhood is perverted into the language of timeless deities and supernatural destinies. The emergent truth is definitively occulted.

The road to Damascus is therefore not merely an ascent towards a redemptive name (as outlined in Part Two), but also a descent into ever-increasing torments of malediction and exile.⁶⁷ These parallel paths of damnation and salvation undertaken simultaneously – "the Eternal's anger is always a kind of grace" – take us back to Strindberg's poetic project in which a fictional double is afflicted in order for the creator to be beatified. This double-moment in fact informs Strindberg's own interpretation of Paul: "As Saint Paul says: his body is delivered to the tortures of Satan, so that his soul can be amended and merit its salvation"⁶⁸ – and it is here that Strindberg stands furthest from Badiou.⁶⁹

And yet, as I argued in the Introduction, even this definitive distinction between the militant subject (e.g. Paula) and the obscure subject (e.g. The Stranger) is not enough. My task in this paper is to distinguish Badiou and Strindberg's practices of naming, and while the cate-

presence I sense, but in solitude we are never alone. The air thickens, the air swells and entities are born. We do not see them. But we sense their presence" (Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 152).

⁶⁶ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 204.

⁶⁷ It is for this reason that Strindberg continually confuses the road to Damascus with the road to Calvary throughout the plays (Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 209, 216, 218).

⁶⁸ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 227, 228.

⁶⁹ See Badiou's rejection of any reading of Paul as legitimating masochism or suffering in general, *Saint Paul*, 66-8.

gory of the obscure subject differentiates the subject that names, the ground of naming and its purpose, the names themselves remain indiscernible. To repeat, there seems no distinction between Paula's language in *The Incident at Antioch* and The Stranger's in *The Road to Damascus*. From a linguistic, rhetorical and pragmatic point of view, the speeches of a mystic-without-mysticism repeat those of the fully-blown mystic. My aim in the second half of this paper is therefore to discriminate more finely the differences that pertain to practices of naming *in themselves*. Where does the radical difference Badiou relies upon reside and how precisely does it manifest itself in the name? To achieve this, I turn to the theory of discourses put forward in *Saint Paul*. It is here we find Badiou's most sustained engagement with mystic discourse.



Chapter Four of *Saint Paul* proposes "a schema of discourses" that articulate four "subjective dispositions": the prophet, the wise man, the apostle and the mystic. Prophetic discourse, represented in Paul's writings by the figure of the Jew, is one of signs: "a prophet is one who abides in the requisition of signs [...] testifying to transcendence by exposing the obscure to its deciphering." On the other hand, the discourse of wisdom, represented by the Greek, is one of immanence and cosmic totality. It is transmitted in the form of the philosophical syllogism. Paul's own discourse of the apostle is positioned "equidistant from Jewish prophesy and Greek logos," "subtracted from both". Apostolic discourse is "a speech of rupture" that bears witness to the event: "What matters is to declare in one's own name that what took place took place." Badiou continues,

What imposes the invention of a new discourse, and a subjectivity that is neither philosophical nor prophetic (the apostle), is precisely that it is only by means of such invention that the event finds a welcome and an existence in language. For established languages, it is inadmissible because it is genuinely unnameable.⁷⁰

Apostolic discourse is linguistically and rhetorically inventive, insofar as it names the unnameable by means of illegal names drawn from the void. It is the "language of the naked event, which alone captures thought".⁷¹ The apostle speaks anew, with fresh names both empty and full of meaning.

⁷⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41, 43, 50, 31, 44, 46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

There is one other discourse, and Badiou elucidates it by means of a gloss on Corinthians II.12:

Let us note in passing that Paul delineates, as if in shadowy outline, a fourth possible discourse, besides the Greek (wisdom), the Jew (signs), and the Christian (eventual declaration). This discourse [...] would be that of the miracle, and Paul gives it a name, subjective discourse of glorification. It is the discourse of the ineffable, the discourse of non-discourse. It is the subject as silent and mystical intimacy, inhabited by 'things that cannot be told' [...] only experienced by the subject who has been visited by a miracle.⁷²

This mystic will speak in "unutterable utterances" alone: apophatic words that immediately negate themselves into silence, words that point to intimate illuminations impossible to communicate, words that inadequately testify to inner miracles. Such words are utterly "obscurantist". Moreover, Badiou goes on to argue that such a discourse – as soon as it is uttered – immediately become indiscernible from a prophetic discourse of signs:

Supposing I invoke the fourth discourse, and hence the private, unutterable utterances, in order to justify the third (that of Christian faith), *I relapse inevitable into the second discourse*, that of the sign, the Jewish discourse. For what is a prophecy if not a sign of what is to come? And what is a miracle if not a sign of the transcendence of the True?⁷³

Both the mystic and the prophet must make recourse to obscure signs that point beyond: the first to a transcendent realm without, the second to immaculate experience within. However, whether inner or outer, such transcendence can only be hinted at in cryptic images and apophatic practices. We are back here with the obscure subject of *Logics of Worlds* who occults the present through gnomic reference to an atemporal plenitude outside of time.

And yet obscurantism is not to be dismissed so readily, for it haunts the very discourse from which it is supposed to be discarded. The mystic "is like an Other within"⁷⁴ – "within", that is, the very heart of Badiou and Paul's own militant language of the event. In other words, according to Badiou, Paul's apostolic discourse is constituted by means of distancing itself from the fourth discourse of the mystic as much as from those of the prophet and wise

⁷² Idem.

⁷³ Ibid., 51, 52, 53.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 51.

man, but *nevertheless* subtraction from the mystical is a far more difficult and less clear-cut procedure than in the other instances.

This becomes particularly evident in Badiou's interpretation of Corinthians II.1:

Clearly then, for Paul, miracles exist and have concerned him. He delineates a particular subjective figure, that of the 'exalted' man, who has perhaps been summoned out of his body during the course of his life. But this figure is precisely not the one the apostle is going to present. The apostle must be accountable only for what others see and hear, which is to say, his declaration. He has no need to glorify himself in the name of that other subject who has spoken with God.⁷⁵

The mystic disposition is not abjected entirely; it is not even altogether avoided. It is, rather, acknowledged, then immediately silenced. Paul draws attention to its presence at the very moment he eschews it. It takes the place of "the Other within himself". In Badiou's terms, mystic discourse lies "unaddressed" within the apostolic, and this seems to involve a complicated operation of almost simultaneous admission and denial of the mystical. Hence, Paul "refuses to let addressed discourses [...] be justifi[ed] through an unaddressed discourse, whose substance consists in unutterable utterances," but nevertheless this unaddressed mysticism still holds "a marginal and inactive position" and "remains a mute supplement".⁷⁶ This is a very significant admission: the language of mysticism supplements – even if mutely – the language of the event. It does not stand outside a discourse of truths like something merely jettisoned, but remains a necessary, if continuously silenced, component within it.

Badiou's later relation to his own 'mysterious' theory of the supernumerary name bears similarities to this, as we have seen. This component of *Being and Event* stands both inside and outside the system, a vital part of its development (for it stands center-stage in the original exposition of the event) and yet belatedly reduced to a marginal, silent and inactive remainder. The name is perpetually abjected as 'the Other within'. Just as for Paul, therefore, Badiou's rejection of the mysterious depends on the stability of this complicated procedure of silencing from within, a constant self-purification in which mystical remnants are forever being swept into the corner. And it is the question of such stability that I now wish to tackle in the final section of this paper by having one final go at delineating the difference between Badiou's names and those of the mystic from a slightly different, if related, perspective: the temporality of the name.

⁷⁵ Idem.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

2.2 The Road to Damascus 2: Hermeneutics, Apocalypitics and Pragmatics

Badiou is always in the midst of purifying his thought of mysticism. At the opening of *Saint Paul*, he makes this point, more generally, as follows,

The crucible in which what will become a work of art and thought burns is brimful with nameless impurities; it comprises obsessions, beliefs, infantile puzzles, various perversions, undivulgeable memories, haphazard reading, and quite a few idiocies and chimeras. Analyzing this alchemy is of little use.⁷⁷

While this image is intended to apply to Paul's oeuvre, I am arguing that it needs also to be referred back to Badiou's own philosophy: the supernumerary name is treated as an impurity forever being burned off in the attempt to distill pure Badiouianism. The irony, of course, consists in the fact that, since the above repeats alchemical imagery quite explicitly, it immediately raises the specter of the mysterious once more, drawing Badiou's language back into proximity to those fully-blown mystics, like Strindberg, who never tire of alchemical metaphor and who likewise insist on a continual process of self-purification. They too exclaim, "I will be purified like gold is purified by fire!"⁷⁸

And so the question of what distinguishes such indiscernible images recurs. As a final attempt to elucidate it, I want to consider Badiou's difference from the mystic in terms of three tenses of the name – that is, in terms of the temporalities which structure processes of meaning-acquisition. The question, then, is in what timeframe do names gain meaning. Badiou and Strindberg alike insist on the emptiness of the name in the present; they both, that is, agree that the name is at present senseless with respect to existing languages – so then the ways in which it comes to gain meaning are crucial. And it is my contention in what follows that the time in which this happens ultimately, if precariously, distinguishes Badiou's names from those of the mystic. Initially, however, a rough classificatory schema is required. There are three tenses of the name on which I wish to focus: the first (hermeneutics) is past-oriented; the latter two (apocalypitics, pragmatics) both oriented towards the future.



The hermeneutic tradition interprets a name in terms of its effective history: meaning takes

⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁸ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 232.

the form of baggage that each word carries forward. It is why memory, community and the transmission of texts become such significant categories. Ricoeur's comments on the name of God illustrate this clearly: "Naming God only comes about through the milieu of a presupposition [...] This is the presupposition: Naming God is what has *already taken place* in the texts". In other words, names are rooted in "a historical drama", "bound up with the founding events in which the community of interpretation recognises itself enrooted, set up and established. It is these events that name God". The task of the hermeneut is therefore to recognize that meaning has always already occurred and so to allow the past to manifest itself in all of its complexity. This gives rise to "a poetics of politics" grounded in responsibility to the already-existing truths of tradition, as well as an obligation to come to terms with one's own identity in light of its ineradicable roots. In short, meaning arrives from the past, and a name has always already received its sense.⁷⁹

Badiou's hostility to hermeneutics is well-documented,⁸⁰ and is as virulent here as elsewhere. For example, Ricoeur's stress on "the duty to remember" leads, according to Badiou, to "the victory of the Christian vision". The hermeneut is necessarily a "Christian subject," for meaning is only acquired here in relation to "founding events" and transmission through communities of interpretation (churches).⁸¹ The fundamental conservatism of this conception of names evidently impedes the arrival of the new. As Badiou writes of Paul, "The apostle is neither a material witness, nor a memory".⁸²



An equally popular strain of recent philosophical reflection on the name identifies the advent of meaning with the messianic or apocalyptic. In Jacques Derrida's definition of the messianic, it is "a logic turned toward the future [...] in a heterogeneous and disjointed time".⁸³ The name receives meaning suddenly from the void.⁸⁴ This conception of the name informs Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas's writings on language, but it is in the early work of Philip Good-

⁷⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," trans. David Pellauer, in *Rhetorical Invention and Religious Inquiry*, ed. Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 200), 163, 170, 181 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁰ See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004), 22-40.

⁸¹ Alain Badiou, "The Subject Supposed to be a Christian: On Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*," trans. Natalie Doyle and Alberto Toscano, *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2.3 (2006): 27.1, 27.2.

⁸² Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 44.

⁸³ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 181.

⁸⁴ See Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. and trans. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), 213-4.

child that I wish to locate it briefly here.

On Goodchild's basically Bergsonian philosophy of language,⁸⁵ words fail to get at life, so the acquisition of meaning requires the destruction of the word. Only by "relinquishing its grasp on the sign" does thought "return to actual lived experience". That is, vital forces "remain secret," unable to be symbolically represented for "the sign does not contain a trace of the life of the thing". At present, language kills. In fact, signs only signify at all successfully with respect to the future, by indicating a meaning-to-come that cannot yet be delivered: "The sign constitutes a promise for faith of the coming of the truth [...] Finally the apocalyptic moment may arrive." At the moment, words fail, but this does not preclude the possibility of a radical break in the future that will ultimately "plunge [thought] into the categories of life". This is why Goodchild insists upon "construct[ing] ontology on the basis of the future," even if such construction-work requires patience in expectation of the rupture-to-come. If writing a philosophy-book is doomed to failure now, all one can do is wait: "Absolute faith allows the future to be constituted as a gift [...] Absolute faith waits."⁸⁶

Badiou's response to such apocalypticism is simple: "If everything depends on an event, must we wait? Certainly not [...] Thought does not wait, and it has never exhausted its reserve of power."⁸⁷ He substitutes optimism in the power of the faithful subject for such pessimism. For Badiou, the subject can always act now in the wake of the event; the future Goodchild so fervently prays for has already taken place.



Hence, Badiou replaces the apocalyptic future with a pragmatic one, involving the ad hoc working out of meaning in signifying practices. His is a pragmatics of the name. The eventual name is meaningless for the moment, but the task of the faithful subject is to keep on uttering it, slowly devising a new 'subject-language' that spirals outwards from the supernumerary name and that remains illegal from the point of view of pre-existing languages. The accumulation of meaning depends on the labor of the subject: the militant does not wait; she talks.⁸⁸ In *Being and Event*, Badiou describes this process of meaning-acquisition as follows,

⁸⁵ See Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (London: Routledge, 2002), 106, 150-1.

⁸⁶ Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion*, 238, 117, 228-9, 223, 237, x.

⁸⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 111.

⁸⁸ See *Ibid.*, 88.

[Initially, outsiders] generally consider that these names are empty [...] an arbitrary and content-free language [...] These witnesses, in a certain sense, are right. The names generated – or rather, composed – by a subject are suspended, with respect to their signification, from the ‘to-come’ of truth [...] [They] *displace* the established significations and leave the referent void: this void will have been filled if truth comes to pass as a new situation.⁸⁹

More precisely, however, from the militant subject’s perspective, “The subject generates names whose referent is *in the future anterior* [...] Such names “will have been” assigned a referent or a signification.”⁹⁰

The subject works at language, “bend[s] and change[s]” pre-existing meanings so as to articulate the novelty of the event. Here resides the ‘power’ of the speaking subject – in the capacity to alter, emend and generate meanings for the sake of the new.⁹¹ Texts that bear witness to the event therefore have a pragmatic function: they form part of the ongoing labor of a subject-language in constituting a new form of words out of the ruins of the old. Thus, Badiou writes that truth demands “those enquiries, sermons, works and statements in which these names are realised.”⁹² There is no responsibility towards a founding past, nor is his concern the self-conscious failings of an apocalyptic text written in the hope that it will one day mean something. Badiou’s future is homogeneous and meaning-acquisition is gradual. To quote from *Saint Paul* once more, “Truth is a process, not an illumination.”⁹³



Badiou, then, insists upon a futural pragmatics of the name, flatly rejecting both hermeneutics and apocalyptics as models for meaning-acquisition. In Strindberg’s mystic theater, however, one finds a much more inclusive and, for this reason, eclectic range of practices: Strindberg embraces many different modes of meaning-acquisition in *The Road to Damascus*, and in consequence his names possess more than one tense. This rich temporal texture is to be definitively contrasted with Badiou’s purified future anterior.

As we have already seen at length, the assortment of names circulating in *The Road to*

⁸⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 398-9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 398 (emphasis mine).

⁹¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 82.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 395.

⁹³ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 15.

Damascus are all old ones – names mainly drawn from the Old and New Testaments. This is true not only of the names received on the stages of life's way (Cain, Eve, the Prodigal Son etc), but also the final true name bestowed on The Stranger, John, which explicitly makes reference to John the Baptist (both "preached in the desert"⁹⁴). As we have seen, Badiou never denies that old names can be deployed in new ways; however, what distinguishes Strindberg's names at this juncture, and approximates to a Ricoeurian model, is the fact that the characters only make sense of their new names in reference to old stories. They begin to see themselves as repetitions, re-enacting the Biblical stories again and again.⁹⁵ As the trilogy unfolds, the sense that there is nothing new under the sun grows stronger: each character is doomed to repeat the same part *ad infinitum*. These are names that gain meaning from the past.

At the same time, however, apocalyptic symbolism is also present. The river and White House in *The Road to Damascus* III, in particular, point to a heterogeneous future-to-come, where a radically new form of beatific life is possible. In the White House, time stops and meaning attains fullness; it is only here – at the end of time – that The Stranger is able to receive a true baptism. The action prior to this moment had consisted in glimpses of redemption, obscure signs gesturing towards the White House. This is equally true of the transitory names that the characters receive: they await meaning in the White House; they only gain their significance in relation to the final name, John.

Moreover, in addition to a hermeneutics and an apocalypitics of names, traces of a *mystic pragmatics* can also be found throughout *The Road to Damascus*. Indeed, how else does a Strindbergian drama function if not through the gradual accumulation of senses for names through their continual textual circulation and dramatic performance. Names are coupled with, then divorced from others; they are forgotten, then remembered; they are predicated of literal and metaphorical properties; they are spoken in different voice, different tones and from different postures. And this process is nothing else but the way in which names gain meaning in the theater. When The Stranger baptizes Eve at the beginning of the trilogy, the sense of the name exists in the future anterior (as it does with traditional baptisms); it will have meaning only once it has been deployed, circulated and worked upon. The plays themselves perform a pragmatic labor on names.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 359.

⁹⁵ Nowhere is this shown better than in the court case of *The Road to Damascus* III where the Tempter demonstrates at length that all human subjects merely repeat Eve's primal sin (*Le Chemin de Damas*, 321-5).

⁹⁶ Again, we must return to The Stranger's rationale for this act of nomination: "By giving her a name

In opposition to Badiou's insistence on temporal purity, Strindberg mixes tenses: the past, the apocalyptic future and the pragmatic future co-exist, all cumulatively contributing to the accumulation of meaning in his plays. He practices a confusion of the tenses. It is here, moreover, that I consider the distinction between the Badiouian name and the mystic name to be greatest. The mystic's empty name is filled from tradition, from the coming apocalypse as well as from the pragmatic working out of a text. Badiou, on the other hand, insists on a constant vigilance in maintaining the purity of the pragmatic mode. Names for the true are kept pristine by means of the perpetual warding off of 'nameless impurities' (such as hermeneutic and apocalyptic meaning-acquisition). Discursive purity is to be maintained at all costs. One might ask in closing, however: if "philosophy is always (re)naming," is such a drive to purity at all feasible?⁹⁷ Perhaps instead, just as the mystic mode of discourse collapses into the prophetic, pragmatic naming cannot uphold the integrity of its borders either. Or perhaps, just as the supernumerary name is constantly expelled as 'the Other within', so too other modes of meaning-acquisition exist mutely within the system as internal tears – marginal, inactive supplements to the official system.

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myself, I made her mine, and I intend to transform her completely according to my will." (Strindberg, *Le Chemin de Damas*, 188) This is the perspective of the playwright: characters receive names as part of a process of formation, of manipulation. The Stranger, in effect, claims: Eve will have become my double, for she will have become 'Eve' – and the same is true of Strindberg's mystic pragmatics as a whole.

⁹⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 521.

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Theaters of Individuation

Gilbert Simondon and the Interrelations of Ethics, Techniques,
and Ontology

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In a central passage in *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique* Gilbert Simondon uses "theater" as a metaphor to describe the process of individuation: Individuals are "theaters of individuation."¹ This metaphor is telling with regard to his understanding of agency in general and his conception of the human in particular. A theater entails more than the performance on stage and the crowd that fills the auditorium. It is a conglomerate of complex operations that entail the play, the architectural construction of the theater, stage machinery and its interaction with actors, props, etc. Many of these processes and operations remain hidden from the eye of the beholder, but are essential to the success of a show: A lighting

¹ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1964), 69.



technician has to set the right atmosphere on stage, props have to be prepared and costumes to be knitted. But even here, we are far from giving a fully-fledged account of the practices that are at work in a theater. We are merely describing a couple of human practices. One could even go further and turn from the social, psychological and aesthetic practices to the physiological, physical and chemical operations that lie underneath these practices.

One could claim that this is only due to the perspective one chooses and that, when extended endlessly, the metaphor of theater loses its meaning. But the crucial point of the metaphor of the theater is for one, that all these practices – despite their differences – take place simultaneously under one roof and are therefore somehow related to one another. Furthermore, all of these practices are ‘staged’ when we turn our attention towards them and begin our description. The interesting questions are therefore: how are they related to each other, how do they differ from each other and how do we get from one perspective to the other?

For Simondon “theater” is more than just metaphor. The “theater of individuation” describes the ontological situation of an individual in the making. Each individual – be it a human subject or a technical object – is embedded in a milieu and consists of a multiplicity of elements that interplay with each other. This interplay between the different actors and props on stage and the surroundings is the essence of the practices that any processual ontology seeks to address.

The metaphor of theater expresses therefore simultaneously the need for a genuinely philosophical method that provides the means to grasp adequately the operations and the practices unfolding “on stage”. Practices mediate sense. They transport, share and distribute the *logos*,² interpreted as a metaphysical force inherent in all beings, among the different actors and objects constituting the theatrical scene. The metaphor of the theatre of individuation already hints at Simondon’s ontological and methodological understanding of ‘analogy’: ‘analogy’ signifies a practice of mediation. Thus, Simondon develops his method in understanding ‘analogy’ both as a methodological tool and an ontological phenomenon by the help of which operations on the different ontological levels can be interrelated.

My article will therefore move from the ‘internal theater’ (the individual as a subject) to the ‘external theatre’ (the technical object). The ultimate aim of my argument is to show how ‘in-

² The *logos* is here not merely referring to rationality, but to its understanding as a cosmic principle. Although Simondon rather turns to the Anaximander and the *apeiron*, when referring to metaphysical principles, it is adequate to speak of the *logos* at work on every ontological level that can be described. It serves merely as a principle that allows description of anything at all.

ternal' and 'external' theaters are intimately linked to and rely upon each other. Both are based on a *physis* – animated matter – allowing for transformations to take place.

A constant architectural process is at work on multiple stages and theaters of individuation. The individual constructs and builds structures in its milieu. Simultaneously, it is structured by the milieu. While transforming its milieu the living being is transforming itself. This constant process of individuation is characterized by an ongoing recursive causality with the natural milieu and continued via the technical object. Thus, the technical object has to be understood as an *analogical being* mediating between human beings and nature. Technical objects are therefore themselves virtual theaters of individuation that are actualized by human practices.

In summary, my article is an attempt to explain the four following theses regarding Simondon's conceptualization of the theater of individuation:

- (1) The individual is an absolute starting point. A principle prior to the individual cannot be epistemologically achieved. Yet the individual is not only a starting point in a heuristic sense but also in a metaphysical and ontological sense. It is always involved in creating, structuring and inventing its relation with its milieu. Human individuals do so via *analogy*. They search relations that are similar to their own mental functioning and realize them within nature. Knowledge has to be understood as a specific kind of individuation, i.e. as an action of a living being which is structuring its milieu. Simondon develops therefore an *allagmatic method of analogy* in order to address the plethora of practices on the different ontological levels.
- (2) The individual is *building* structures within itself and outside of itself: The individual individuates constantly and thus remains alive. It transforms itself and its milieu simultaneously. When the ability to transform and to build structures is lost, the individual dies.
- (3) Technical objects are themselves individuals and milieus. The application of the method of analogy allows one to describe technical objects in the same terms as living beings. Techniques³ are thus described out of the perspective of the 'living being'. The *allagmatic method of analogy* allows to move from one ontological level to another. It signifies the capacity to create technical individuals and is the condition of possibility for symmetrization of living beings, technical and non-technical objects on an operational level.

³ I use the concept "techniques" instead of "technology" because Simondon imagined technology as a, or *the*, science of the humanities.

- (4) Ultimately, the philosophy of Simondon is resulting in an ethical attitude towards materiality and technical objects based on the ontological principle of *openness*. This ethical principle also applies to the structure of technical objects. Technical objects should be open objects instantiating participation. This last point exemplifies how Simondon conceives even technical objects as theaters of individuation building and prolonging socio-technical networks.

The Allagmatic Method of Analogy

Simondon calls his method *allagmatic*. It is derived from the Greek verb *allagmeîn* and signifies *change*, *exchange* and the *operation of change*.⁴ The allagmatic method is thus the “method of operations” and it is “symmetrical to the theories of structures in the particular sciences.”⁵ Whereas the sciences deal with structures, the allagmatic method searches for the realms where operations take place. A fundamental trait of the allagmatic method is therefore that it comprises two modes: On the one hand, it has as its object operations, on the other hand it has to be itself an operation that provides communication between formerly separated levels of being. The danger, if it was only taking operations as objects, would be that the dynamic aspect of the operation itself would be lost and only structures would remain. How can such a specific method be developed?

Operations are usually conceived of in terms of two separate states: a state before and after the event of the operation. To understand an operation as operation requires however to account for the interval between these two separate states. Any methodological approach to a phenomenon creates already an interval between the researcher and its phenomenon. A specific phenomenon can also be approached using different methods. A hermeneutic approach to emotions is significantly different to a neurobiological approach. Therefore, intervals exist even between the particular sciences.

Simondon is interested in these intervals existing between all agents within being. An interval implies a relation and therefore an operation.⁶ Intervals in mathematics and music necessitate the mediation of two separate states. Already for Plato this mediation between two separate states is achieved by analogy. The analogy is conceived of as “the fairest of bonds is

⁴ Jean-Yves Chateau, *Le vocabulaire de Simondon* (Paris: Ellipses, 2008), 11.

⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2013), 529.

⁶ Idem.

that which perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together.”⁷

Simondon’s method has certain ontological postulates.⁸ His first methodological step to approach the dynamic aspects of being searches for a domain where *operations* take place and where access to these operations is provided. If this domain exists and if it can be found, it can serve as an absolute starting point for a philosophy of operations. Simondon identifies the individual as such a domain:

Se demander ce qu’est l’être, c’est se demander comment s’articulent le fonctionnement, c’est-à-dire le schématisation holique d’un être, et la structure, c’est-à-dire la systématique analytique du même être: le schématisation chronologique et la systématique spatiale sont organisée ensemble dans l’être. Leur union fait l’individualité, l’individu étant un domaine de convertibilité réciproque d’opération en structure et structure en opération: l’individu est l’unité de l’être saisi préalablement à toute distinction ou opposition d’opération et de structure. Il est ce en quoi une opération peut se reconvertir en structure et une structure en opération; il est l’être préalablement à toute connaissance ou à toute action: il est le milieu de l’acte allagmatique.⁹

The individual is characterized as “being before any knowledge and action”. It is primary to any specific form of praxis and theory. It is the place where any kind of operation, be it theoretical or practical, occurs. It is the domain where operation and structure are intrinsically linked and can be converted into each other. As a concrete being it undermines the classical distinctions between structure and operation, subject and object or theory and praxis. It is thus the point of departure for any process of individuation that can be grasped.

This opens the way for the second step of Simondon’s method. In order to answer the question *what* being in general might be, one has to focus on the question of *how* a being operates. The self is the very first being one experiences. But rather than proposing a theory of knowledge that restricts itself to introspection, Simondon searches for operations on every level of being. Similar to Aristotle, Simondon begins his search for operations on the most basic level to gradually move from the physical, to the biological, to the psychological and finally to the social individuation. His second methodological step is therefore to identify the processes of one ontological domain and then to proceed making analogies with another

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, Loeb Classics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 59.

⁸ Simondon, *L’individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 267.

⁹ Simondon, *L’individuation à la lumière*, 535.

domain.¹⁰

It is, however, important to note that Simondon does not want to reduce one domain to another, but rather identifies processes in order to show the essential contrasts between the different domains of being. Turning to the individual allows this differentiation, since individuality itself is defined on every level as a specific kind of praxis and refers to the relation of structure and operation within each being. The question 'what is a being?' has therefore to be converted into the question 'how does a being act/operate?'. Epistemology and ontology are therefore intrinsically linked:

Mais toute théorie de la connaissance suppose une théorie de l'être; la méthode analogique est valable si elle porte sur un monde où les êtres sont définis par leur opérations et non par leur structures, par ce qu'ils font et non par ce qu'ils sont: si un être est ce qu'il fait, s'il n'est pas indépendamment de ce qu'il *fait*, la méthode analogique peut être appliquée sans réserves. Si au contraire un être se définit par sa structure autant que par ses opérations, la pensée analogique ne peut atteindre tout la réalité de l'être. Si enfin c'est la structure, et non l'opération, qui est primordiale, la méthode analogique est dépourvue de sens profond et ne peut avoir qu'un rôle pédagogique ou heuristique. La question première de la théorie de la connaissance est donc métaphysique: quelle est la relation de l'opération et de la structure dans l'être?¹¹

Simondon is not simply arguing over and against a seemingly trivial epistemology of the "hard sciences", but is rather pointing out that each and every theory of knowledge presupposes an ontology. The 'hard facts' of science signify the result of individuation, i.e. a structure. The aim of the scientist is to produce a concrete and stable structure, which adequately described reality. This means that ontology can be reductive and limited, but also that within this limited framework it produces specific results that are not independent of the presupposed ontology. (1) As already mentioned, for Plato the analogy is a cosmic principle that allows the Demiurge to structure the world of things.¹² But if for Plato the Demiurge is a fea-

¹⁰ I am aware that Simondon also uses the word 'transduction' (and even more prominently) to describe this method. But in my opinion, both analogy and transduction can refer to the same process. They signify different perspectives that can be taken. Transduction is the more general concept, referring to processes in general. Analogy is the specific epistemological tool human beings apply to address operations on all ontological levels.

¹¹ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 534.

¹² See Wolfgang Kluxen, "Analogie," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie: Völlig neubearbeitete Ausgabe des 'Wörterbuchs der philosophischen Begriffe' von Rudolf*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Vol. 1 (Basel,

ture of a transcendent being, for Simondon the 'demiurgic' principle is an ability of individuals. The individual creates order and structures within being and among beings. (2) Beings are essentially constituted by their practices. The essence of a being is what it does. This means that it is determined not from the outside, by an observer, but by its internal functioning. The operations that are at work within a being and the operations of a being in interaction with its milieu are of interest to the philosopher. The traditional table of categories may suffice to determine what a being is, but it cannot account for how a being operates. It classifies stable properties, but it does not classify the transformative and dynamic aspects of a being. A being can be located and certain aspects of it can be described, but the description of the operational mode of the individual falls short. (3) Essentially, this means that praxis, i.e. the operations of an individual, is prior to its structures. (4) The fundamental question is thus, how do operation and structure relate to each other?

Structure and operation are not the elements of a binary logic. Rather than having structure or operation, structure and operation are complementary to each other. They are related to one another within being. The creative act is in itself simultaneously constituted by structure and operation. Depending on which aspect one focuses one's attention, you either contain or abandon the structural or the operational element.¹³

Simondon argues that to describe his objects adequately, the scientist has to take into account himself and his actions. The example Simondon offers is the practice of geometry: Drawing a parallel line, the mathematician is interested solely in the structural element of the act. His attention is focused on the drawn line and the relation of this line to another straight line. But one is not limited to this perspective. It is also possible to focus on the operational aspects of the act: bodily and mental gestures interpenetrate each other and are executed simultaneously while the mathematician is drawing parallel lines:

Ce geste de tracer possède son schématisme propre. Le système dont il fait partie est un système opératoire, non un système structural; ce geste procède en effet d'une volition qui est elle-même un certain geste mental; il suppose la disponibilité d'une certaine énergie qui se trouve libérée et commandée par le geste mental à travers tous les maillons d'une chaîne de causalités conditionnelles et complexes. L'exécution de ce geste met en jeu une régulation interne et externe du mouvement dans un schème opératoire de finali-

1971), 215.

¹³ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 529.

té. Ainsi, la géométrie et l'allagmatique prennent des voies divergentes es le début même de leur activité.¹⁴

While in the former case the geometrical structure is prominent and operations are merely the background for the parallel line, the relation of figure and ground is turned upside down in the latter: here, actions and operations are spotlighted. Different objects are formed, if the attention is turned towards the operations that are constitutive for the actions. An analogy mediates between both perspectives: the being of the parallel line is in neither case separated from the action of drawing. Even if the parallel line is considered merely as an abstract, mathematical entity it comprises a mental gesture which is in itself an act.

This does not imply a reductionist position which would identify the mental gesture with a material one, but rather shows how the methodological use of the analogy moves from one level of description to another. Yet, on both levels the *logos* is present and effective.

Each of the possible perspectives are certain forms of individuation and differentiate the path that the *logos* follows. They both are part of (1) an operative system that relies on (2) a certain kind of energy and (3) executes an operational schema which implies an internal and external regulation. The essential property of the act, for Simondon, does not result from the differentiation in perspectives, but rather from the fact that structure and operation are simultaneous within the act, and that the act is enabling structures and operations via a potentiality that lies within it. The mediation through analogy is always relating two separated domains to each other and is thus inventing new perspectives.

The method of analogy is a constructive, scientific practice. Simondon's constructivism is, however, far from being reductive. He neither claims that the so-called 'hard sciences' represent simple facts of reality nor that they create their theories detached from any ontological reality. In fact, the sciences create their objects *with* reality:

L'activité scientifique a véritablement constitué du concret à partir de l'abstrait, car le concret qui vérifie les hypothèses est un concret d'une espèce particulière : ce n'est pas celui d'un *fait*, mais celui d'un *effet* qui n'existerait pas en dehors de l'univers de pensée et d'action créé par ce développement même de la science. C'est en ce sens que la démarche scientifique est auto-justificative, non-logiquement, mais réellement, en construisant son objet avec le réel.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 530.

¹⁵ Ibid., 524 ff.

Scientific practices produce effects in reality. The researcher creates a universe of thought and action and invents new pathways in being with his method. The practices of science are a mode of action of living beings. Structurally they do not differ from actions, but they can be distinguished according to their specific operational mode. The sciences must work with analogies. Science distills structures in this way and creates its object *with* and *in* the world.¹⁶

This implies that the ontological structure of the world allows the scientist to construct and invent within the world. Simondon therefore defends a minimal ontology of creativity:

La méthode *analogique* ou *paradigmatique* [...] ne se fonde pas sur un postulat ontologique qui serait par exemple la rationalité du réel, ou une loi universelle d'exemplarisme, de type platonicien, ni non plus un monisme panthéistique implicite; elle se fonde au contraire sur la recherche d'une structure et d'une opération caractéristique de la réalité qu'on doit nommer individu; si cette réalité existe, elle peut être susceptible de formes et de niveaux différents, mais on doit autoriser le transfert intellectuel d'un domaine à un autre, au moyen des conversions nécessaires; les notions qu'il faudra rajouter pour passer d'un domaine au domaine suivant seront alors caractéristiques de l'ordre de réalité qui fait le contenu de ces domaines. L'ontologie de l'individu sera dévoilée par le devenir de son épistémologie, et les principes d'une axiologie possible naîtront de cet examen, dans la mesure où il fournira un fondement à une postulation de valeur capable d'intégrer en un acte unique d'autoconstitution une conscience de la réalité ontologique et de la signification épistémologique.¹⁷

Although this quote is another example of the difficult philosophical style of Simondon, his method is quite traditional in its operative steps: (1) Each domain of being and the operations that take place there have to be described comprehensively. This comprehensive description provides the means to discern the essential qualities of the operations of an individual. (2) One has to distinguish the concepts necessary to describe each domain and the transition from one ontological domain to another. Concepts always refer to the content of each and every domain. As soon as a new concept is introduced a qualitative leap is made. Concepts thus represent the differences between the various domains of being. (3) Ultimately, Simondon is searching for the mode of existence of the individual: its epistemology and its ontology. The epistemology of the individual has to be taken in a broad sense. It signifies firstly the way in which an individual relates to itself and to its milieu. The epistemology of the

¹⁶ See Paul-Antoine Miquel, *Le vital. Aspects physiques, aspects métaphysiques* (Paris: Kimé, 2011).

¹⁷ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 525.

individual is the latter's practice creating values that anchor the individual in its relation with the milieu (*le devenir de son épistémologie*). Values are not necessarily moral ones; rather they are normative structuring patterns of reality in one way or another. Asking for the epistemology of an individual is asking how an individual structures its actions and experiences in exchange with its milieu. Researching this recursive relation of an individual with its milieu requires one to make a new effort regarding each individual which is being researched. Each individual has to be understood through an epistemological act that creates an analogy between the individuation of the researched individual and the self of the researcher. Knowledge - in a scientific sense - can only accompany the individuation of other beings. In order to grasp the act of individuation one has to individuate knowledge itself:

L'individuation du réel extérieur au sujet est saisie par le sujet grâce à l'individuation analogique de la connaissance; mais c'est *par l'individuation de la connaissance* et non par la connaissance seule que l'individuation des êtres non sujets est saisie. Les êtres peuvent être connus par la connaissance du sujet, mais l'individuation des êtres ne peut être saisie que par l'individuation de la connaissance du sujet.¹⁸

Simondon stresses the ontological quality of knowledge as an act. To answer the question of what a being is, means therefore already to act and to define a being within the limits of one's epistemological categories. An answer to the question about how a being acts, although restricted to the same epistemological categories seeks to comprehend analogically the praxis of the being in question.

This refers to the twofold sense of an individual that I mentioned at the outset of this paper: purely epistemologically speaking, it is impossible to access a state that lies before the subject. So far, this is merely a Kantian position. Knowledge is relative to its conditions of possibility. But knowledge as act is an *arche*, a *beginning* that has ontological significance. It creates something in being. It is architectonic. In order to grasp this fundamental act, knowledge has to become the subject and object of itself simultaneously. Once this perspective is taken, the very operation of knowledge is revealed and acted out in its relation to its milieu. Analogy serves then as a tool that distinguishes and relates epistemological individuation to other forms of individuation.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 24.

¹⁹ Subject and object are thus in a relationship that relies on their internal structure: "S'il était vrai que l'organisation ne se perd ni se crée, on aboutirait à cette conséquence que l'organisation ne peut que se transformer. Un type de relation directe entre l'objet et le sujet se manifeste dans cette affirmation,

The core argument of Simondon is that the operational mode of beings – the *how* of their actions – is the very essence of their being. The constructive aspect of science is therefore according to Simondon ontologically inseparable to the being performing this particular kind of action: The scientist as a living being.

The Living Being as Theater of Individuation

The operational understanding of individuation leads to a peculiar definition of the individual. The philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to the psychology of *Gestalt* explained the individual in terms of stability. Individuals were considered as *stable* forms that are the final results of the interplay of form and matter. This conception of the individual goes back to the hylomorphic schema which leads to a “false representation” of the individual:

Le schéma hylémorphique n'est pas seulement inadéquat pour la connaissance du principe d'individuation; il conduit de plus à une représentation de la réalité individuelle qui n'est pas juste : il fait de l'individu le terme possible d'une relation, alors que l'individu est, au contraire, théâtre et agent d'une relation; il ne peut être terme qu'accessoirement parce qu'il est théâtre ou agent, essentiellement, d'une communication interactive.²⁰

Rather than being a stable result, where transformations do not any longer take place, Simondon conceives of the individual as *agent* and *theater* of individuation. This twofold role defines the *essence of the individual*. The individual is therefore neither form nor matter. Simondon turns the classical distinctions upside down: The individual is only *per accidens* a term, i.e. an end the process of individuation arrives at. The stable aspects of a being do not provide specific differences for individuals. In fact, it is the ability to communicate actively which constitutes an individual.

Furthermore, the stable form is no longer an information that contains potentiality and can initiate further individuations. It lacks the potentiality of the individual to transform itself. Individuals have therefore to be thought of in terms of *metastability*, rather than in terms of stability.

The metastable state is the state of a system which still allows for transformation.²¹ The

car la relation entre la pensée et le réel devient relation entre deux réels organisés qui peuvent être analogiquement liés par leur structure interne” (Ibid., 141).

²⁰ Ibid., 69.

²¹ Ibid., 89ff.; Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Ma-*

prototypical example of Simondon is the process of crystallization. A seed crystal provokes the crystallization only if it meets a supersaturated solution. The metastable solution is a necessary condition of crystallization. The solution has to be in a state that contains potential energy. The crystal seed individuates this solution and transforms it into crystals. The process is stopped as soon as the solution is no longer in a metastable state. The process can however be reinitiated if the solution is brought once again on this level of energy. Crystallizations occur only in systems that show tension of potential energy.

The individual is thus no longer defined as the stable form, which would be the final result of an individuation, but rather the process of individuation itself. This perspective allows Simondon to conceive of individuals on different ontological and epistemological levels. During the process of crystallization the crystal is already an individual, but not in terms of assembled crystallized molecules. In order to be conceived as a physical individual, physical individuals are conceived in their becoming a stable entity. A physical individual is on its way towards individuation. It exists in its relation with the milieu, which is constituted at the borderline (*limite*) between physical individual and the milieu. Physical individuals exist thus at *their limit*:

La substance serait un individu physique totalement résonant par rapport à lui-même, et par conséquent totalement identique à lui-même, parfaitement cohérent avec lui-même et un. L'être physique doit être considéré, au contraire comme plus qu'unité et plus qu'identité, riche en potentiels; l'individu est en voie d'individuation à partir d'une réalité préindividuelle qui le sous-tend; l'individu parfait, totalement individué, substantiel, appauvri et vidé de ses potentiels est une abstraction; l'individu est en voie de devenir ontogénétique, il a par rapport à lui-même une relative cohérence, une relative unité et une relative identité.²²

Instead of talking about substances, Simondon introduces the notion of potentiality to address the phenomenon of individuation. Even on a physical level there is potentiality. Individuality is neither an ideal nor a material quality; it rather refers merely to the immanent capacity of transformation. This capacity is neither transcendental nor materialistic. It rather refers to the law of entropy, the concept of metastability and the concept of the field: physical individuals exist as long as they contain potential energy.

chine, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 58ff.

²² Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 126ff.

The individual as a system falls apart as soon as this energy is exhausted. In the terms of thermodynamics, the system arrives at a stable state, but transformations are no longer possible. The molecules are separated from each other and the field no longer contains any tension.²³

Unity and identity of a physical individual are therefore relative to the milieu with which they form a system. One can even speak of a *radical liminality* of the physical individual, since the process of individuation takes place on the borderline (*limite*) between the crystal and the milieu. The crystalline structure spreads out and transforms the milieu. Once the process occurred the individual crystal and the milieu are separated. The physical individual receives information only once and individuates itself.²⁴

The living being is on the other hand a true theater of individuation. It is a system that individuates itself simultaneously with its milieu.²⁵ The essential difference between the physical and the living individual is therefore drawn according to their activity: Whereas the physical individual receives information only once and individuates itself accordingly, the living being is as theater of individuation involved in a permanent activity of individuation:

Le vivant conserve en lui une activité d'individuation permanente; il n'est pas seulement résultat d'individuation comme le cristal ou la molécule, mais théâtre d'individuation. Aussi toute l'activité du vivant n'est-elle pas, comme celle de l'individu physique concentrée à sa limite; il existe en lui un régime plus complet de résonance interne exigeant communication permanente, et maintenant une métastabilité qui est condition de vie.²⁶

Instead of being radically liminal, the living being entertains a recursive relation with its milieu. The individuation changes not only the milieu but also the living being itself. It resonates within the living being. This internal resonance signifies the specific mode of how information is received and processed.²⁷ The difference between the physical and the living being lies in the capacity to receive or to absorb information.²⁸ Whereas a physical being receives information once, a living being absorbs information and transforms itself accordingly.

Henri Bergson, in his description of the activity of the living being as being a dark zone of

²³ Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 58.

²⁴ Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 132.

²⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective à la lumière des notions de Forme, Information et Métastabilité* (Paris: Aubier, 2007), 35.

²⁶ Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁸ *Idem.*

indeterminacy, brings forth a similar argument.²⁹ The living being absorbs stimuli rather than returning them immediately as the billiard ball in a strictly Newtonian universe does. The experience of pain is for Bergson the expression of not being able to absorb stimuli anymore. The living being is in danger of being disintegrated and has therefore to react against the stimuli in order to claim its position in the world.³⁰

The living being instantiates a recursive relationship with the world, and that energetic exchange with its milieu changes the inner structure of the living individual. The living individual has a unity, but this unity is relative both to its interior and to its exterior milieus. The living being has according to its complexity a plurality of milieus in its interior and its exterior. It is a *theater of individuation* which is constantly (re)defining its relationship with its milieu:

Si l'individu est saisi non comme terme d'une relation, mais comme résultat d'une opération et comme théâtre d'une activité relationnelle qui se perpétue en lui, il se définit par rapport à l'ensemble qu'il constitue avec son complémentaire, qui est du même ordre de grandeur que lui et au même niveau que lui après individuation. La nature dans son ensemble n'est pas faite d'individus et n'est pas non plus elle-même un individu : elle est faite de domaines d'être qui peuvent comporter ou ne pas comporter individuation.³¹

The recursive causality of the individual in and with its milieu is of high importance especially for human beings. Human beings do not only structure a natural habitat and are structured by their surroundings, but they also create entirely new technical environments. Individuating themselves and creating something of the same magnitude/dimension means to find and to create relations in being. This is precisely what is meant when the sciences create 'reality effects'. Its activity is not arbitrary. It deals with an inert and abstract matter that replies to the activity of the scientist and plays an active role in the realization of a phenomenon. Materiality is always "vibrant".³² This potentiality of matter also applies, when artificial things such as technical objects are created. "Living matter" carries information and provides the background for the invention of technical objects.³³

²⁹ Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*, pref. Camille Riquier, ed. Frédéric Worms (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008 [1896]), 35ff.

³⁰ Ibid., 56.

³¹ Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse de physico-biologique*, 73.

³² See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³³ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958), 59ff.

The process of individuation is prolonged by means of networks of technical objects. The conception of nature being constituted of multiple areas of being in which individuation can take place, leads thus to a dynamic and recursive understanding of technology. Technical objects are specific ontological entities that relate different realms of being with each other. In this sense they are the result of an analogy and are *analogical* beings:³⁴ they allow for translation and transition from one area of being to another. If living beings are theaters of individuation, then technical objects are the props that fill the stage and allow new individuations to take place. The props however also change the status of the actors on stage. They define the paths and possibilities of the actors. It is therefore important to understand how technical objects act in their relation with human beings in order to understand how *analogies are performed on stage*.

Technical Objects as Analogical Beings

Nous sommes des êtres naturels qui avons dette de *techné* pour payer la *physis* qui est en nous; le germe de *physis* qui est en nous doit se dilater en *techné* qui est autour de nous. On ne peut accomplir son essence sans faire rayonner les organisateurs que l'on a en soi.³⁵

The ontological status of man leads to a peculiar situation. Human beings are always involved in further individuations in order to realize the 'seed' of *physis* that lies within them. The creative output of man relies on *techné*³⁶ as anchor-point where man's action can enter into social and technical networks of practices. Human beings are therefore embedded into technical networks in which they can realize themselves. Nevertheless these technical networks are not necessarily of the post-industrial age, but are rather an essential component of any human society. The debt to technique (*techné*) is made to pay tribute to nature (*physis*).

Technical objects are the result of human invention. Simondon conceives them as crystallizations of human gestures and thus continues the tradition of Marcel Mauss who claims, in his

³⁴ Technical objects as *analogical beings* must not be understood in difference to *digital objects*. Analogical refers in this context to Simondon's philosophical method. A computer can be an analogical being as well as a record player.

³⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *Sur la technique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), 24.

³⁶ Simondon turns against the traditional distinction between *techné* and *episteme*. According to him, the first technicians had a scientific/epistemic interest; today, engineers have seemingly lost this interest and are merely specialized workers. The true technical activity, however, is located in the sciences (Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 340).

famous essay "Techniques du corps," that the human body is the first human technical instrument.³⁷ Yet Simondon goes further than Mauss. On the one hand, his philosophy of technology is embedded in and relies upon his complex ontology of individuation. On the other, it is focused on *industrial objects* where functionality is no longer dependent upon the human body as its source of energy.³⁸ This independence calls the ontological status of technical objects into question: in what sense are technical objects crystallizations of human gestures and what follows from such a definition? What is the specific character that allows technical objects to evolve and to have their own inner logic?

Technical objects are the result of an invention and thus solutions to problems of *incompatibility*.³⁹ This incompatibility already begins on the level of the living individual.⁴⁰ The milieu in which the individual lives is not static and homogenous. It is itself changing constantly and thus entails unpredictability. The actions of living beings in their milieu try to stabilize the relations with it as much as possible. But, as noted earlier, the milieu must not reach an absolute stable state, since this would render the survival of the living being in the milieu impossible, while in that case all potentiality would have been lost in the milieu. A balance between stability and reliability of practices and the potentiality to transform and change these practices has to be achieved in order to maintain the living relationship with the milieu. Technical objects mediate the relationship of the living being and the milieu. This aim of this mediation is to create networks, and a harmonious relationship between nature and human needs:

Il n'y aurait pas de réseau s'il n'y avait pas une certaine structure naturelle, d'une part, un certain besoin humain, d'autre part, ensuite l'invention d'une relation harmonieuse entre cette nature, et ce besoin humain. Le réseau, c'est la rencontre de la possibilité technique

³⁷ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 340; Johannes Schick, "Die Philosophie verlassen, um das 'Ganze' zu erreichen," in *Begeisterung und Blasphemie: Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Erhard Schüttpeitz and Martin Zillinger (Bielefeld, 2015), transcript, 257-59; Marcel Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," in Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, technologie et civilisation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 365-94.

³⁸ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 33, 302.

³⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et Invention* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2008); Johannes Schick, "Die Erfindung der Offenheit. Kreatives Handeln im Ausgang von Gilbert Simondon," in *Die innere Logik der Kreativität*, ed. Johannes Schick and Robert Hugo Ziegler (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2013), 153-79.

⁴⁰ "Le problème [...] du sujet et celui de l'hétérogénéité [...] entre l'individu et le préindividuel; Ce problème est celui du sujet en tant que sujet: le sujet est individu et autre qu'individu; il est incompatible avec lui-même": Simondon, *L'individuation psychique*, 108.

et de l'existence naturelle.⁴¹

The first and foremost incompatibility of human beings consists in the difference of their own needs from those of natural structures. Human beings must adapt to their environment. The invention of technical objects creates a *network* relating human needs with natural structures. Technical possibilities meet the natural existence in the nodal points of the network. Here, technical objects embody the *topos* where information is processed, exchanged and produced in a recursive interplay of cognitive, material, vital and natural features. Concentrating on the operational mode of technical objects that consists in providing links between human needs and natural structures, the strong distinction between operation and structure is dissolved. Technical potentiality actualizes itself in exchange with its existence in nature.

This interplay continues and mirrors the ontological status of human beings. As the living being constitutes and is constituted by its milieu, the technical object has an analogous relationship as mediator between human beings and the natural environment:

Nous pouvons créer des êtres techniques parce que nous avons en nous un jeu de relations et un rapport matière-forme qui est très analogue au rapport entre objet technique structuré et milieu naturel. L'objet technique individualisé est un objet qui a été inventé, c'est-à-dire produit par un jeu de causalité récurrente entre vie et pensée chez l'homme.⁴²

The technical object is analogous to the ontological situation of man. It results from the interplay of life and thought which are the two components of a recursive causality. This 'feedback-loop' is also at stake within the technical object. A technical object is confronted with two environments that are not necessarily compatible with each other. On the one hand, it consists of technical elements that constitute the "technical milieu" and on the other hand it is exposed to the natural environment.⁴³ The technical milieu defines the relationship of the parts amongst each other. Technical objects consist of different parts that can be replaced without damaging the whole. This does not apply to living organisms in the same fashion. In contrast to technical objects living beings are *concrete* from the very moment of their existence. Technical objects have the *tendency to evolve* from an *abstract* state to a *concrete* state.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 438.

⁴² Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 74f.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 68ff.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

This specific understanding of *abstract* and *concrete* goes back to Bergson's understanding of matter. Bergson claims that man conceives of matter using his intellectual faculties as being abstract and consisting of *partes extra partes* without having any interior organizing principle.⁴⁵ According to Bergson, objects are thus distinguished and discerned. The intellect (*intelligence*) is only capable of representing this discontinuous aspect of matter clearly, but it does not have the means to understand continuity and becoming.⁴⁶

This critique of the intellect is accompanied by Bergson's conception of man as *homo faber*: the intellectual understanding of matter results from the technical nature of man. Man is a tool-making animal who constructs artificial objects, be they material tools, such as a hammer, or ideas, such as the categories of human understanding.⁴⁷ However, it is impossible to understand movement, time or any living organism with by intellectual faculties alone.

Simondon adopts this perspective but modifies it significantly. Although one can find in Bergson a conception of matter that entails potentiality,⁴⁸ technical objects are conceived of as static entities and not as dynamic systems analogous to living beings. Whereas Bergson claims that the tool-making faculties that understand the world transform dynamic processes into stable entities, Simondon points out that the invention of a technical object not only mediates the relation to the world but also instantiates a process of becoming that is not entirely in the hands of its creator:

L'objet technique n'existe pas seulement par le résultat de son fonctionnement dans les-dispositifs extérieurs [...], mais par les phénomènes dont il est le siège en lui-même : c'est par là qu'il possède une *fécondité*, une *non-saturation* qui lui donne une postérité.⁴⁹

The technical object participates in *physis* and is made out of a material with specific properties providing the conditions of possibility for its functioning. Material properties are therefore not arbitrary; they play an essential role in the development and the evolution of technical objects.

⁴⁵ Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, ed. Arnaud François and Frédéric Worms (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 155.

⁴⁶ Idem.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁸ In fact, there exist two possible readings of Bergson. One can interpret Bergson's conception of matter in a dualistic fashion (matter is animated by spirit). It is also possible to defend a position that understands the dualisms of mind and matter as methodological steps to reveal the interpenetration of matter and spirit on the level of experience.

⁴⁹ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 52.

The abstract technical object consists of multiple parts that are exterior to each other.⁵⁰ It becomes more and more *concrete* and *organized*, i.e. similar to an organism, where the different parts serve different functions at the same time and entertain an intrinsic relationship with each other:

Concret, c'est *concretum*, c'est-à-dire quelque chose qui se tient et en quoi, organiquement, aucune des parties ne peut être complètement séparée des autres sans perdre son sens.⁵¹

This genetic perspective of the technical object is only possible before the background of Simondon's "allagmatic method of analogy". As mentioned earlier, the scientist moves from the abstract to the concrete to create 'reality effects.' The scientific object is also the result of a recursive process which moves from the abstract to the concrete and back. But in contrast to the technical object the scientific object relies on the methodological framework of a science and is created to research a singular effect and its conditions comprehensively, whereas the technical object is synthetic in its application relating different structures and sciences with each other.⁵²

Technical Objects and an Ethics of Openness

The synthetic process of becoming concrete has to be understood in analogy to living beings. Understanding technical objects from the vantage point of living beings neither drifts off into apocalyptic nightmares of animated machines taking over the world, nor does it reduce technical objects to mere means to an end. The aspiration to follow technical objects in their evolution is driven by an anthropological and ethical interest. Techniques have *meaning* and express *life*: "Même si les techniques n'avaient ni utilité ni fin, elles auraient un *sens* : elles sont dans l'espèce humaine le mode le plus concret du pouvoir d'évoluer; elles expriment la vie".⁵³

⁵⁰ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 40.

⁵¹ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 432.

⁵² This does not mean that interrelations between the sciences are not in themselves technical (i.e. psychology can use methods from other disciplines to study a genuinely psychological discipline). According to Simondon the theory of information mediates between the different sciences, between the techniques and between science and techniques (Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 154-55). It is not surprising that cybernetics was from the very start an interdisciplinary endeavor.

⁵³ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 321.

Simondon's philosophy of technology refers to a "vitalist" tradition (Bergson, Canguilhem etc.⁵⁴), on the one hand, and to an anthropological tradition on the other (Mauss, Haudricourt, Leroi-Gourhan). To understand techniques as an expression of life should not be mistaken as an esoteric claim: Technical objects are the result of 'social' actions, since they are actions of human beings. Within the realm of the social, technical objects transform and structure human practices.

These practices of human beings in the world are by definition actions of living beings and hence expressions of life on a biological level. The difference to the so-called "vitalists" such as Driesch and Bergson is that Simondon does not formulate a strong metaphysical principle hinting at a teleology in the universe. In fact, he defends a *minimal ontology* by pointing out the necessity of metaphysics for epistemology and ethics. Without ontology and metaphysics an epistemology remains the hostage of a skepticism that cannot explain any transformation. Without an ontological principle – however minimal it might be – ethical actions do not have any point of reference to evaluate actions.

The ethical principle is derived out of his ontology: Living beings have to maintain their metastability to remain alive. They have to build *open* systems with their milieus and create sense. Openness is therefore a value in itself, since it is the basis upon which beings remain alive. This ethical principle does not, however, rely upon a binary logic that establishes the categorical opposition of good and bad. It rather creates infinite degrees of values. In referring ethics to an ontology of openness Simondon stands in the tradition of Socrates:

Une société dont le sens se perd parce que son action est impossible devient communauté par conséquent se ferme, élabore des stéréotypes; une société est communauté en expansion, tandis qu'une communauté est une société devenue statique; les communautés utilisent une pensée qui procède par inclusions et exclusions, genres et espèces; une société utilise une pensée analogique, au sens véritable du terme, et ne connaît pas seulement deux valeurs, mais une infinité continue des degrés de valeur, depuis le néant jusqu'au parfait, sans qu'il y ait opposition des catégories du bien et du mal; pour une société, seules les valeurs morales positives existent; le mal est un pur néant, une absence, et non la marque d'une activité volontaire. Le raisonnement de Socrate οὐδεις ἔχων

⁵⁴ I am aware that vitalism is a concept far too broad and of ill repute in the scientific discourse and is far from covering the philosophical depths of the positions of Bergson, Canguilhem, and others. Vitalism signifies in this context an epistemological and metaphysical precaution: human beings are not capable of adopting a perspective that is not itself an expression of vital capacity. Objective knowledge is the achieved through actions of living beings, or, to speak with Simondon, the result of an individuation.

ἀμαρτάνει, selon lequel nul ne fait le mal volontairement, est remarquablement révélateur de ce qui est la véritable conscience morale de l'individu et d'une société d'individus; en effet, comme la conscience morale est auto-normative et auto-constitutive, elle est par essence placée dans l'alternative ou bien de ne pas exister, ou bien de ne pas faire le mal volontairement; la conscience morale suppose que la relation à autrui est une relation d'individu à individu dans une société.⁵⁵

Simondon opposes community and society by attributing to each of them a particular style of applying the intellect. While the community is characterized by categorization and tends to be "closed", a society applies analogical thinking "in the proper sense of the word", i.e. ontologically, and remains constantly open to various processes.⁵⁶ Analogy is contrasted to the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion. It avoids xenophobia, since even if an individual is an other, it expresses as individual and living being an analogous ontological tension as the human subject. This does not mean that otherness is reduced to the logic of an absolute subject, but it is conceived of as a relation between individuals. Ethics consists in the refusal to become an absolute individual and in the maintenance of internal and external tension. Ethics expresses thus the sense of a continued individuation.⁵⁷ It enables one to relate technical objects, living beings and human beings as theaters of individuation. On stage, ethics provides agents who are conceived of as individuals containing, realizing and fostering potentiality.

This relation with both the internal and the external must be created through actions of living beings. Actions are understood as inventions of openness via analogy. Simondon points out that a community does not allow for actions, since it is defined by a binary logic merely discriminating between good and bad. An action, as it is defined by Simondon, always surpasses the actual state of mind and state of the art. Decisions within the framework of a readymade table of categories, would merely stabilize a community, but would not lead to the perpetuation of the capacity to transform itself. Concerning techniques, this means that new techniques realized through a major technical gesture (*geste technique majeur*) are a risk, a dangerous undertaking, a bet regarding the future; and they are not even immedi-

⁵⁵ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 337.

⁵⁶ The categorical distinction between "closed" and "open" objects, systems, societies and "static" and "dynamic" goes back to Bergson's 1932 *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion*. In that, societies seem to develop from a closed, static, primitive religion to an open, dynamic religion. Simondon is more reluctant than Bergson to promote any sort of teleology inherent in the evolution of societies.

⁵⁷ Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 325.

ately useful.⁵⁸ As adventurous endeavors they threaten a community in questioning its binary logic. Technical – and scientific – progress transform the relationship of man with its milieu:

Le geste technique ne s'épuise pas dans son utilité de moyen ; il aboutit à un résultat immédiat, mais il amorce une transformation du milieu, qui réagira sur les espèces vivantes, dont l'homme fait partie. [...] Il ne s'agit donc plus ici d'une technique comme moyen, mais plutôt comme acte, comme phase d'une activité de relation entre l'homme et son milieu ; au cours de cette phase, l'homme stimule son milieu en introduisant en lui une modification ; cette modification se développe, et le milieu modifié propose à l'homme un nouveau champ d'action, exigeant une nouvelle adaptation, suscitant de nouveaux besoins ; l'énergie du geste technique ayant cheminé dans le milieu revient sur l'homme et lui permet de se modifier, d'évoluer.⁵⁹

It would be a foregone conclusion to characterize Simondon's ethics as a blind embrace of modern techniques. Although the technical gesture is able to transform man's relationship to the world and is able to open a closed community, it also implies new constraints which arise out of the modified relation with world. Together with new technical objects, a new need of adaption and new desires are created that are prone to exploitation.

This entails a peculiar ethical attitude towards not only the other human being, but also towards nature and materiality. The human being as theater of individuation participates in *physis* as well as other beings that inhabit the milieu. The tribute to *techné* that was invoked at the beginning this part of the article has to be amended according to the *physis* of which human beings and their milieu are made. This means that technical objects are equipped with potentiality. It is this potentiality that has to be maintained, honored and respected. Instead of being *homo faber*, Simondon's conception of man can be conceptualized as *homo coordinans*. Man is in the midst of material and technical objects. His function is to *coordinate* the network of technical objects.⁶⁰ In difference to the unilateral actions of the *homo faber*, Simondon stresses the independence of technical objects and the recurrent influence of technical objects on what it means to be human: man is coordinated in the strict sense of the word. Technical objects are also structuring human practices.

The ontological status of man *in* and *with* the world as part of ongoing processes of individuation, challenges the classical relation towards materiality and technical objects. Simon-

⁵⁸ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 321.

⁵⁹ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 320.

⁶⁰ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 13.

don demands an epistemological-ethical attitude towards material things.

Instead of a Conclusion: Technical Objects as Theaters of Individuation

The sense of technical objects can only be fully grasped if we understand their inner technologic. This means that using them is not enough to see them for what they really are. The epistemological challenge of technical objects consists in attempting to reinvent them. This re-invention is achieved by realizing the analogy between the mental operational mode of the human being and the physical operational mode of the technical object. The crystallization of a human gesture in technical objects allows for this reinvention. Strictly speaking, a technical object is never out of date, since it can be actualized by a human being. This actualization involves more than the mere usage. Technical objects can be used for other purposes than intended.⁶¹ This abuse of the object would reduce it to mere means without understanding the inner logic of it. An ethical attitude towards techniques is interested in *praxis* of machines⁶² and attempts to accompany its *genesis* via analogy:

La machine est un geste humain déposé, fixé, devenu stéréotypie et pouvoir de recommencement. [...] La relation analogique entre la machine et l'homme n'est pas au niveau des fonctionnements corporels. [...] En fait, la véritable relation analogique est entre le fonctionnement mental de l'homme et le fonctionnement physique de la machine. Ces deux fonctionnements sont parallèles, non dans la vie courante, mais dans l'invention. Inventer, c'est faire fonctionner sa pensée comme pourra fonctionner une machine, ni selon la causalité, trop fragmentaire, ni selon la finalité, trop unitaire, mais selon le dynamisme du fonctionnement vécu, saisi parce que produit, accompagné dans sa genèse. La machine est un être qui fonctionne. Ses mécanismes concrétisent un dynamisme cohérent qui a une fois existé, qui a été pensée. Le dynamisme de la pensée lors de l'invention, s'est converti en formes fonctionnantes.⁶³

⁶¹ Obviously, this can also lead to new inventions.

⁶² Simondon distinguishes between instruments, tools and machines. Although all of them can be technical objects and can be part of technical networks, they differ in how they relate human beings to their environment. Instruments are directed towards perception, whereas tools manipulate (in the literal meaning of the word) matter and are directly linked to human beings (or animals) as their source of energy. Machines, however, run to a certain extent on their own. Once activated, a motor will run as long as it has enough fuel. The human being does not interfere as source of energies (Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*).

⁶³ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 191.

This passage shows clearly how Simondon thinks about the relationship between human beings and technical objects. Techniques have to be understood in their functional vitality. He is not proposing a symmetry of human and technical actors à la Latour, since technical objects are “not reduced to agency” to borrow a phrase of Timothy Ingold.⁶⁴ Technical objects remain in the realm of artificiality and are not concrete in the same manner as living beings. In focusing on the operations and practices with and within technical ensembles, Simondon locates technology within the vital networks of human beings. Technical ensembles are thought from the vantage point of the living being and thus as part of the human milieu.

This vitality refers to a dynamic understanding of being and provides the metaphysical possibility for technical objects. Furthermore, it expresses the philosophical challenge of grasping this dynamic process intuitively and to develop a perspective spreading beyond causality and finality. Technical objects and human beings participate in the movement of becoming and build together a unity in the intuitive act of invention. Simondon does not by accident identify technical objects with crystallizations of human gestures. This analogy has to be once again understood in its full ontological impact: Reinventing a technical object and using it again – recycling it – resumes the process of crystallization and mobilizes the technical object.

The function of human beings is thus to maintain the metastability of technical networks and the virtual presence of human gestures within them. For the *homo coordinans* in the era of information and “digital objects” this means to understand the operations within technical environments and to make sense of them. Technical objects install operations within being that are dynamic and function due to an animated matter.

Homo coordinans actualizes the potentiality of technical ensembles and furnishes vital machines by the maintenance of the latter’s functionality. This maintenance is a praxis in the trivial, mundane sense as well as in a philosophical temporal sense: machines are kept up to date, they are kept in the *present*. The *homo coordinans* is the vital mediator within the technical universe creating a reciprocal, vital relation with the world through the technical universe. She creates sense in referring the technical universe to the natural world.

Yet *homo coordinans* is not merely a descriptive concept. The far more important aspect of it is its ethical demand for a (re)newed relationship with the material and technical world. As mediators in the midst of technical objects, the ethical aim of men is to create meaning in the universe. Only by overcoming the alienation of technical objects from human beings, caused by the reduction of technical objects to utensils, may a true understanding of ma-

⁶⁴ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive. Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 215.

chines and of man himself be achieved:

L'individu humain apparaît alors comme ayant à convertir en information les formes déposées dans les machines ; l'opération des machines ne fait pas naître une information, mais est seulement un assemblage et une modification de formes ; le fonctionnement d'une machine n'a pas de sens, ne peut donner lieu à de vrais signaux d'information pour un autre machine ; il faut un vivant comme médiateur pour interpréter un fonctionnement en termes d'information, et pour le reconvertir en formes pour une autre machine. L'homme comprend les machines ; il a une fonction à jouer entre les machines plutôt qu'au-dessus des machines, pour qu'il puisse y avoir un véritable ensemble technique. C'est l'homme qui découvre les significations : la signification est ce qui fait qu'un événement a valeur d'information.⁶⁵

Human beings, as coordinators of technical network are translating mere signals into qualitative information. Human beings, as the creators of technical objects, are by-and-by responsible for the latter's functionality. Simondon compares the relationship between human beings and technical objects with the relationship of a conductor with his orchestra.⁶⁶ Although each of the musicians can play on her own, the conductor is necessary to give meaning to the whole. The conductor is at the same time dependent on her orchestra as she is creating signification with it. Human beings are therefore necessary to transform mere signals into veritable information. The noise an orchestra produces when every musician plays simultaneously for herself is transformed into piece of art when someone understands the parts each musician plays, interprets them and refers them to each other.

The conductor invents thus while being in the midst of his orchestra together with its musicians the musical theme. Even though the conductor does not produce *ex nihilo* a piece of music and relies on the musical script, she interprets the musical piece anew. She has to rely on the musicians, their instruments and the staging of the event. The network of these technical objects, instruments and musicians provides the background for the invention of the piece of music on stage.

Invention is not only the act of a genius who creates something absolutely new, nor is it the mere, trivial participation in Heraclitus' river. Invention signifies an ideal of knowledge symmetrizing human beings and technical objects in an act of analogy. Although machines might never have the same degree of concreteness as living beings do, they are also irreduc-

⁶⁵ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 190.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

ible to finality or utility: Machines are analogical beings. They create information that can only be translated into meaning through human beings and can only be understood through their mental activity. The inventive activity of the mind is instantiating thus an analogy with the machine.

Analogical relations crystallize the human gesture in the machine, and gestures transform themselves within the process of concretization. The technical object results from a praxis of transformation that continuously creates and changes reality. It therefore challenges man to constantly transform his relation with himself and the milieu by inventing the technical being anew:

Par-là, l'être technique se convertit en civilisation; par ailleurs, un être technique, même peu intégré dans la communauté, vaut comme objet à comprendre; il exige un type de perception et de conceptualisation qui vise à comprendre l'être technique en le recréant; l'être technique existe donc comme un germe de pensée, recélant une normativité qui s'étend bien au-delà de lui-même. L'être technique constitue donc de cette seconde manière une voie qui transmet de l'individu à l'individu une certaine capacité de création, comme s'il existait un dynamisme commun à toutes les recherches et une société des individus créateurs d'êtres techniques.⁶⁷

The *homo coordinans* is challenged to be conscious of the virtuality of technical objects and the gestures they embody. Technical objects are never completely out of date: they contain are always apt to be reinvented in actualizing their inherent potentiality. This conception implies a certain obligation towards materiality, in order to preserve the normativity of the technical individual as virtual invention in being.

The crystallized gesture is not only connecting man with the technical realm, but also instantiating the possibility of a communication between individuals creating a society. This feature of technicity has to be understood in terms of information: A gesture is always the carrier of information and is executed by living beings. As such it can be appropriated, reinvented and communicated. The technical object mediates between human and non-human actors in space through time. In this perspective, it becomes itself a theater of individuation that fosters further acts of invention, individuation and communication. As crystallized human gesture it carries a certain kind of openness with it.

Evidently, this openness can be obstructed, when the user is no longer able to partic-

⁶⁷ Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 267.

ipate in the maintenance of the technical object. This being the case with most technical objects in the world of globalized capitalism shows that Simondon's philosophy points towards an ethics allowing the *homo coordinans* to participate in the natural and technical becoming via practices of information. But it would be far too easy to shift the blame on historical developments. The ethical attitude Simondon demands always begins with the individual.⁶⁸ It is therefore not surprising that man's relation with materiality and technical objects is exemplified by the artisan:

Dans la véritable puissance de l'homme habile, il y a une relation de causalité récurrente. Le vrai technicien aime la matière sur laquelle il agit; il est de son côté; il est initié mais respecte ce à quoi il a été initié; il forme un couple avec cette matière, après l'avoir domptée, et ne la livre qu'avec réserve au profane, car il a sens du sacré. L'artisan, le paysan éprouvent encore de nos jours répugnance à livrer au commerce certains ouvrages ou produits qui expriment leur activité technique la plus raffinée et la plus parfaite : cette prohibition de la commercialité, de la divulgation, se manifeste par exemple dans les exemplaires hors commerce qu'un imprimeur, un éditeur et un auteur peuvent donner d'un livre. Elle se manifeste aussi chez le paysan pyrénéen qui offre à son visiteur, chez lui, certain aliment qu'il ne laisse ni acheter, ni emporter.⁶⁹

It might seem strange to consider material things as holy if one reduces them to their physical attributes. This reduction forgets however the technical activity contained in these objects. In referring more or less implicitly to Durkheim's distinction of the holy and the profane, Simondon points out that material things are holy, because they are essential constituents of a society instantiating participation.⁷⁰

The example of the peasant in the Pyrenees is telling: Simondon is describing a social situation which receives its quality, because the products in question cannot be bought or made for "take away." The food is in this case the material object mediating between differ-

⁶⁸ Simondon is however not unaware of the importance of social structures. He regrets for instance that a true and solid technological education is amiss which is necessary for the development of a technical mentality. Teaching at a *lycée*, he himself gave courses dealing in practical and theoretical manner with technical mentality. An article treating the theoretical and practical teaching and learning contents can be found in Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 203-32.

⁶⁹ Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 132.

⁷⁰ Émile Durkheim argues that societies emerge when the distinction between the holy and the profane is made in *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961 [1912]).

ent social actors. It dissolves the distinction between form and matter in having not only material but also social qualities.⁷¹

Intuitively, food is an example that is quite easy to understand, since sharing food establishes social ties among individuals. But a more radical interpretation is possible here: it seems that it is not the “sharing” that establishes the social ties, but the food itself has the ontological property to generate a social situation.⁷²

This emphasis of the ontological properties of food might provide the link to technical objects. Technical objects contain (1) gestures that lead to practices, (2) an inner logic and functioning that relates different realms of being with each other and (3) mediate the relation between man and nature. All these properties cannot be reduced to a logic of categorization, but refer to the relational aspect of being.

The philosophy of Simondon is an attempt to provide a theory of relations. Each and every individual has to be understood according to their *praxis*. The focus on practices allows Simondon to move his method of analogy from one level of being to the next. The analogy itself is therefore a movement by means of which the relational aspect of being can be grasped. Simultaneously it seems that analogical thinking and creating analogical beings is the *proprium* of human beings whose function it is to play an active part in the ongoing individuation of becoming.

When answering to the principle of openness, the creation of relations with technical objects realizes the essence of individuality. Technical objects that result from respect towards materiality have to be *open objects*, as the situation of love, or couple, being formed between the artisan and his products engineering and technology have to be committed to this task which is at the same time ethical and ontological:

Pour cela, il faut réformer non point seulement notre regard, pour le purifier, mais il faut réformer aussi l'opération technique: elle doit viser à constituer un objet ouvert, perfec-

⁷¹ Mario Schmidt, ‘Edo ergo cogito – Ich esse also bin ich,’ in *Begeisterung und Blasphemie*, eds. Schützel and Zillinger, transcript, 251-5; Marcel Mauss, “Les techniques du corps.”

⁷² This seems to be the case for the Luo in West Kenya: Mario Schmidt and Sebastian Schellhaas were invited into the home of a Luo during an ethnographic study. They did not share food at a table with their host, but were rather eating in a separate room. It seemed that eating together was unnecessary, since social relations are logically prior to individuals and mediated by processes of simultaneous eating and feeding. See Mario Schmidt and Sebastian Schellhaas, “‘Together as One’ – On Social Oneness, Culinary Metaphors and the Presence of the Not-Yet Born in Western Kenya,” *American Ethnologist* (currently under review).

tible et néotechnique, c'est-à-dire dépositaire d'un potentiel évolutif; cet objet ne doit pas être chose vendue, possédée, mais chose qui institue une participation.⁷³

The openness of technical objects is described more closely in the article *La mentalité technique*.⁷⁴ The crucial point of Simondon's argument is that in order to foster the ethical relation towards materiality and technique (the technical mentality), the technical object itself has to have the structure of a network. The post-industrial technical object, Simondon tells us, consists of two layers: It has a stable core that is as stable and permanent as possible and a second layer that allows for exchange of parts. This means that the core of a technical object has to be as concrete (according to Simondon's definition) as possible whereas the relation of the other layer remains open. The exchangeable parts participate in the ongoing process of technical invention. The technical object is therefore not only structure, but also a dynamic mode of operation (*régime*). Participation is therefore reciprocal: The open object participates in socio-technical networks and the *homo coordinans* can participate in organizing participation and keeping it alive.⁷⁵

Only if objects are open and entail the capability of fostering new inventions and further individuations, the technical object becomes a theater of individuations. As theater of individuation it is at the same time actor and prop that regulates, mediates and informs practices of the other actors on stage. Technology is conceived in analogy to vitality. The ethical challenge is therefore simultaneously ontological. Human beings have to understand themselves as participating in socio-technical networks. The human task as coordinator is not to oppress and to subordinate technical objects and living beings in the network, but rather to realize their potentiality as theaters of individuation. The participation in the dynamics of being of any given agent allows for an open relation beyond nature and culture towards the technical and the non-technical world.

Yet, this attitude is not advocating an ontological spiritualism or techno-animism longing for an essence of being beyond concrete existence. The living human subject should rather aspire to create openness and, according to the social situation, to realize itself as "theater and agent of individuation," and thus as a personality.

⁷³ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 364.

⁷⁴ Simondon, *Sur la technique*, 295-313.

⁷⁵ A recent attempt of such an open object is the 'phone bloks' project of the Dutch designer Dave Hakkens, which exemplifies perfectly the idea of an open object, and the difficulty of realizing the idea.

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What Does It Take to Open a Theater?

The *Réouverture des Halles* Experiment in Brussels

Aline Wiame

*Or, as Antoine Vitez used to tell me – theatre having taught him this profound truth:
the essence of vulgarity, even the worst kind that is that of the executioner, is
laziness, that is, wanting to “live” without working or thinking.¹*

Yet Another Empiricist

In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou sometimes indulges in dialogues with an “Empiricist”, who asks for more straight-to-the-point clarity, less monologues, and more concrete examples. In this article, in which I discuss some of Badiou’s theatrical propositions from a ‘non-Badiousian’ background, I would like to assume the position of the Empiricist. But the empiri-

¹ Alain Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” trans. Bruno Bosteels, *Theatre Survey* 49.2 (2008): 195.



cism that is needed for talking about the knot between theater, desire and politics is quite different from the one claimed by Badiou's dialogical opponent. What I would like to follow here is a line drawn by William James's radical empiricism, summarized in this famous quote: "To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions an element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced."²

Such a proposition is directly at odds with an idealist or rationalist approach that emphasizes universals. Nevertheless a radical empiricist could agree with Badiou that theater is an assemblage that produces an event of thought, this thought being made of *theater-ideas* that cannot be found outside the theater.³ The problems begin when we ask which set of relations allows such an event – where, when, how, with and for whom? Can we experience theater-ideas without also experiencing complex and interwoven social, political, cultural, architectural relations? Badiou acknowledges the importance of such questions in the provocative last pages of *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, where he pleads for a public, mandatory attendance to theatrical performances – and consequently for the development of theatrical spaces funded by the State all over French territory.⁴

However, making theater "mandatory" – even for the sake of provocation – is not sufficient: it still excludes components of the global, theatrical experience. Let us take, as an example, a quite common experience spectators can have after having attended an experimental, theatrical performance in Brussels or in Paris. Generally, such 'experimental' performances happen in decentralized places – in the suburbs, or in multicultural neighborhoods where the huge majority of the audience neither lives nor works. It is not unusual then to see people calling taxis or running to a metro to escape an environment perceived as 'dangerous' or 'hostile' once the doors of the theater have closed. It is less usual (although not exceptional) to see people from the audience engaging in conversations with the inhabitants of the neighborhood. The point is: can we seriously isolate the pure theatrical experience those spectators had from all the relations preceding and succeeding it – from the fact they felt and sometimes feared that they had experienced an event in a white, educated, upper-middle-class enclave cut from the reality of its surroundings? Would the situation have been different if the attendance at the performance had been free and mandatory for the inhabitants of the suburb? Probably a little. But wouldn't the artistic and social codes of theatrical performances

² William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), 42.

³ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 72.

⁴ Badiou, "Rhapsody for the Theatre," 231-2.

have still reenacted the divisions between the 'traditional' theater spectators and the others – the theater's others?

In other words, the questions I aim to address in this paper regard two important elements of any theatrical experience: 1st the nature of its public (and, often, its lack of diversity); 2nd the theatrical architecture and its links to its urban surroundings. Following James's statement that radical empiricism cannot exclude from its constructions any element that is directly experienced, I am not trying to operate a sociological deconstruction of Badiou's attempt to think theater philosophically: my goal is much more to evaluate how the consideration of those elements can enrich and empower theater-ideas.

Reopening Theaters

In the second half of the 20th century, European theaters – and most particularly French ones – have been thought of as public services that must be accessible to a large audience and thus not only reserved for Parisians or inhabitants of important cities. However, the theatrical decentralization and the will to open theaters to wide audiences have fallen short of the popular, educational, cultural, or even 'civilizational' expectations they often carry.⁵ As Badiou argues,

The "problem" of the theatre public (its disappearance, or almost, its scantiness, its identity [...]) has primarily been phrased in terms of class analysis: it was a question, by way of lower prices and alliances with the syndicates, to bring the excluded from the Projects into the theatre. Or else it was necessary to go and 'perform' in the towns and villages. This was the era of popular theatre, of culture for all, of theatre as universality above and beyond classes. This required austere theatres, reinforced concrete, the visibility of machines, the repudiation of all velvet and gold, the destruction of the boxes where the noble ladies planted their décolletages. We have lost the velvet and the gold and the décolletages, without having seen the real crowds come in with their blue collars and their berets, even less the totality of the actual modern proletariat [...].⁶

Velvet and gold are not there anymore, and the people are still absent. If neither the

⁵ See, for instance, Robert Abirached, *Le Théâtre et le prince I: L'embellie (1981-1992)* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1992) and Robert Abirached, *Le Théâtre et le prince II: Un système fatigué (1993-2004)* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2005).

⁶ Badiou, "Rhapsody for the Theatre," 230.

splendors of Italian theater nor the humble austerity of concrete theaters can bring a people to their theaters, maybe it is about time to reverse the questions: how may a theater be brought to its people? How can we open, or reopen, theaters to the people who surround them? This question is at the core of the Belgian project *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* (literally: “Reopening of Schaerbeek’s Covered Market”), led by the small, independent publisher, Les Éditions du Souffle. Throughout this article, I will use this project’s propositions to discuss architectural and public elements that are lacking in our theater-ideas.

Schaerbeek is a municipality of the Brussels-Capital Region in Belgium. Home to Brussels’s gentry and upper-middle-class at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, today it is a multicultural place with various popular neighborhoods – where huge Moroccan and Turkish communities live. The *Halles de Schaerbeek* were an important covered market built in 1865, rebuilt in 1901 after a devastating fire, and closed in 1920. The place then became successively a storage device, a garage, and a parking lot. In the beginning of the 1970s, the place was almost sold to a real estate agency but an important mobilization managed to prevent its destruction: a statement of intent written by Belgian theaterman Jo Dekmine suggested the Halles de Schaerbeek could become a cultural center – and they actually became one, step by step. In 1974, the place was ‘occupied’ by a cultural animation team lead by Belgian cultural activist Philippe Grombeer, but it wasn’t until the 1980s that the building was definitively saved from destruction. After two rounds of architectural renovations (to consolidate the building and upgrade it to the latest norms) and an official recognition as one of Brussels’s French-speaking cultural centers, the Halles de Schaerbeek is today a well-established theater, hosting performances, dance, theater, circus as well as crowdfunding events for emerging artists.

Let me be clear here: each year the Halles de Schaerbeek welcomes a large number of cultural events. So, when the *Réouverture des Halles* project talks today about a *reopening* of the Halles, it does not mean that the cultural center has itself been closed. The project’s argument could be summed up as follows: the cultural center is abstractly open, but the building is closed to its first intent and to people, both architecturally and socially. The most direct way to understand why the project considers the primary purpose of the cultural center to have been lost is to examine the two quotations ahead of the *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book, published in 2014 by Les Éditions du Souffle. On the one hand, we find a quote from Jo Dekmine’s statement of intent in 1972; on the other, an extract from the press dossier for the Halles de Schaerbeek’s 2013-2014 season:

People will come to the Halles on impulse. They could sit where they want to, change

seats, even lie down if they are tired, bring their glass of beer or lemonade, smoke their cigarettes. That'd be a kind of public space where nothing would prevent a guitarist to begin playing somewhere or a small orchestra to improvise a street dance. The market must have: its 24/7 drugstore; its bookstore where you can buy your newspaper at 10:00pm – or an orange, or a painting at midnight; a Spanish guy preparing gambas; a muslim butcher grilling a whole lamb. The spectacle is an open fire, not a goal. The place exists stronger than the spectacle, and the people stronger than the place.⁷

The programation aims at maximizing the use of the great hall, according to the maximal number of seats allowed by the current bleachers, and following, as much as possible, a principle of mini-series. Matching their remarkable technical possibilities, the Halles affirm their capacity to integrate ambitious, international projects: the shared welcoming of *Penthesila* with the Charleroi Danses biennial or the participation to the production of two important pieces for the Kunstenfestivaldesarts 2014 are markers of this internationalization. In the following years, the Halles will develop their European, international vocation.⁸

On the one side, we have a utopian vision for what an open theatrical place could be; on the other, what this place has become after several decades of cultural management, including public bills of specifications and architectural renovations aimed at isolating the Halles from their neighborhood – *be quiet and productive while you are at it, and please don't disturb*. Reopening the Halles does not mean going back to an idealized, almost pre-capitalist, and in any way outdated mode of functioning. A sense of possibility has been lost in the process of Halles's adaptation to the norms of other cultural centers. Reopening the Halles means to track back those possibilities and what they can open into the future.

A Performative Architecture

Reopening the Halles de Schaerbeek first means removing its partitions. The book *Réouverture des Halles* – which is the basis of the project – is crystal-clear on that point, even in its composition: everything begins with architectural questions. In addition to a new statement

⁷ Jo Dekmine, quoted in *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*, ed. Marianne Van Leeuw-Koplewicz (Brussels: Editions du Souffle, 2014). My translation.

⁸ Extract from the Halles de Schaerbeek's 2013-2014 press dossier, quoted in *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*. My translation.

of intent regarding what a reopened Halles could be, the book is mainly composed of drawings of the reopened Halles by Yorn Le Bihan and of very precise architectural plans elaborated by Brussels's architectural practice V+ and drawn by Sara Cremer. Those plans are entitled "derenovations". As Thierry Decuypere, who supervised the architectural work on this project, emphasizes: "Derenovating the Halles is deconstructing that which has transformed the minimal, Spartan shelter – a shelter that, for centuries, was enough to welcome collective practices – into a built organism that is simultaneously skillful, obscure and hermetic."⁹

The renovated Halles de Schaerbeek is a work of skill indeed. The renovation process led the architects who were in charge to deploy a number of ingenious tricks to meet various specifications and building codes, such as paying meticulous attention to each patrimonial detail of the initial architecture; the requirements set by the intended cultural programming inside the building; the technical norms which aim mainly at reducing any potential noise pollution. As a result, the building is a very effective 'black box', suited to welcome important, artistic productions but closed to its surroundings. Noises will not bother the neighborhood but this comes at price: the neighborhood will not bother, or mind, the theater anymore. While in the past, the covered market was open to all kinds of winds and people, allowing a mix between the countryside and urban life through the interactions of sellers and buyers, we are now facing two hermetically closed realities.

Now, derenovating the Halles, trying to get closer to its first, open state, also comes at a price. If the building was isolated for the purpose of welcoming technically exigent (and often sonorous) productions, a reopening means radical changes in the events that can take place in the Halles de Schaerbeek. Nocturnal, noisy activities could take place in the basement, while daily, humbler propositions could be performed on a first floor now open to the street. Decuypere's short text in the *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book makes it very clear: programming requirements and administrative, technical norms are not two separate realities – they come together, and we cannot think about the impact of one element without directly considering the other's impact. There is no such thing as a theatrical or artistic idea that has no impact on the material conditions of its realization. And so, it is probable that reopening of the Halles will make things harder for artistic creation, as it will be summoned to take the neighborhood into account on at least two levels: the material impact the creation can have on its neighborhood and the fact that creative processes and representations are permeable to the street and the various inhabitants that walk it.

⁹ Thierry Decuypere, "Retour sur une rénovation exemplaire," in *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*, 29. My translation.

As Decuypere's short text states, the degree of permeability between spaces more than an endless list of technical requirements constitutes the very core of the architect profession:

What do we win, in terms of functional quality and of relations to the world, when we remove or open a wall? What can bring us less selective, and maybe rougher, links between the inside and its neighborhood? The architect finds its role back here, a role that does not consist in doubling limitations but in establishing thresholds opening negotiations for new meetings.¹⁰

Architecture – and theatrical architecture maybe more than any other one – performs. It makes thresholds exist, it institutes selective, open, mild, rough places. One of the main achievements of the book *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* is to present its statement of intent and the architectural drawings on an equal basis. The drawings make suggestions for the future of the Halles de Schaerbeek; they make their reader-viewer feel what another, reopened architectural space could produce. In that sense, the importance of architectural proposals cannot be overstated. We know intuitively that lines perform; we experience it on a daily basis – 'do not cross the line', 'please follow the line'. The *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book superimposes plans of a future reopened Halles building with tracing papers representing the current walls, partitions, and doors that 'close' the Halles. This superimposition shows how lines have a simple and directly efficient impact to isolate spaces and their meanings. But the book also shows that lines, even in the confines they impose, also allow the development of new propositional powers – and the removal or redrawing of lines alone develop a whole new set of potentialities to create new spatial and social meanings. The architectural plans of reopened Halles are thus part of what human-geographer Joe Gerlach calls "vernacular mapping", that is:

Vernacular mapping inheres in the material co-production of cartographies by humans and non-humans alike whereby the underlying ethos remains intensely political, but in a tenor distinct from the representational politics allied traditionally to maps. Vernacular mapping, rather, is a valorizing of mundane cartographies that are caught up in the generation of an as-yet untold micropolitics. [...] Vernacular mappings are non-statist, extra-institutional, participatory, cartographic practices, either digital or analogue in their composition, in which such performances are not taken to be technologies of capture, but

¹⁰ Ibid., 31. My translation.

as techniques of addition; of adding more to the world through abstraction; of adding to the riskiness of cartographic politics by proliferating yet more renders of the world.¹¹

What Gerlach is emphasizing here is the virtual, political potential of a collective appropriation of mapping techniques in order to develop, to make see, feel, and think yet unexplored possibilities for the territories we inhabit. A “vernacular” development of mapping techniques, oriented towards pragmatic everyday life, aims especially at transforming what Tim Ingold calls “lines of occupation” – directed toward the conquest of a rationalized space – into “flowing lines” which follow the gesture of an act, which, just like wayfaring, are neither placeless nor place-bound, but place-making.¹² By revealing possible affective, virtual realities, maps and plans allow us to think of thresholds-spaces, spaces where the negotiations between the inside and the outside, between the technical and the pragmatic, between the administrative and the everyday must constantly be undertaken.

Architectural plans must thus be seen as performances which engage us with various possible stories about the way we open – or close – spaces. The performative aspect of any plan is still reinforced when this plan concerns a theatrical device – the finest performance-place. Encounters and negotiations between geographical, architectural performativities and theatrical performativities must be encouraged: not only does it accentuate the social, material practices that make theater-ideas possible but it also is akin to the spatial turn that affects contemporary arts practices and makes of art a “site” where “intellectual technologies” are invented.¹³ As any theatrical production, architectural plans intend to tell a story, whether it is verbal or non-verbal, about the becomings of spaces and the way we manage (or not) to inhabit them. And conversely, just as any architectural plan, no theatrical production can tell a story without being materially, urbanistically and geographically situated. Theater-ideas, if they are not “lazy” ones, are also architecture-ideas.

Montrer patte blanche: On the Theatrical Crowd, Generic and Particular

I have just asserted that theatrical performances, like theater buildings, tell stories and pro-

¹¹ Joe Gerlach, “Lines, contours and legends: Coordinates for vernacular mapping,” *Progress in Human Geography* 38.1 (2014): 23.

¹² Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 85, 101.

¹³ See Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Press, 1989), and Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), quoted in *Géo-Esthétique*, eds. Kantuta Quiros and Aliocha Imhoff (Clermont-Ferrant/Dijon: B42 Publisher, 2014), 7.

duce possible future stories. Before digging deeper into those stories, an important question must first be answered: who tells those stories, and to which public? This question addresses the nature of the “theatrical crowd” – of what it consists of, both ideally and pragmatically.

Alain Badiou has stated it numerous times: because the theater is a public mediation between the State and its exterior, “the relation between the stage and the public has always been a torturous problem”.¹⁴ However, “real,” efficient Theater – that theater that can lead to the presentation of *theater-ideas* – can only gather a “generic” public – and by “generic” Badiou means “an indiscernible and atypical subtraction of what Mallarmé calls the Crowd”.¹⁵ The “generic” nature of the public must be stated, in this context, against another “false” theater, which is perhaps the most commonly encountered nowadays: a theater that does not produce thought but that is a factor of social distinction; a theater where “those who come to exhibit their salacious or restrained enjoyment in it are marked by an identitarian sign, be it constituted by class or by opinion”.¹⁶

The fact that going to the theater is a marker of social distinction is the first reason for which the title of this subsection includes the French expression *montrer patte blanche*. Literally meaning “showing a white paw,” the expression is used figuratively to say one has to display her/his right to belong: “prove your credentials”.¹⁷ The social homogeneity of the current theatrical public in most European cities may be particular (we are talking of the upper-middle-class and of intellectuals or artists with precarious jobs – not of the upper-class); it is nevertheless the cause and effect of a selective and distinctive process that isolates, once again, the inside of the theater from its surroundings. The *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book insists on this isolating process that reenacts the spatial closing of the Halles – and on the cynicism that cultural marketing can display on that matter. The program for the 2013-2014 season of les Halles de Schaerbeek said, speaking of spectators who would choose not to benefit from their fidelity program: “Give them that pleasure, keep their illusion going: let them be distinguishable with each other, let them pay more”. Playing cynically with post-modern disenchantment, those words only reiterate that culture is won by distinction – and so much the worse for emancipation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Alain Badiou and Elie During, “A Theatre of Operations: A Discussion between Alain Badiou and Elie During,” in *A Theatre without Theatre*, ed. Bernard Blistène et al. (Barcelona: Macba, 2007), 22.

¹⁵ Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” 198.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ The expression comes from one of Lafontaine’s fables entitled *Le loup, la chèvre et le chevreau* (“The Wolf, Goat and Kid”): the wolf tries to pretend he is a goat but it fails when the kid tells him, “Show a white paw or stay without”.

¹⁸ Van Leeuw-Koplewicz, *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*, 20.

The theater public distinguishes itself socially, but also culturally and racially. That leads us to the second reason for using the expression *montrer patte blanche* in the title of this subsection. The paw you have to show to prove your credentials is, well, white, which says a lot about the skin color of the overwhelming majority of the theatrical crowd – and so much for its wished “genericity”. The case of the Halles de Schaerbeek is exemplary here, as the predominantly racially-homogeneous character of its public contrasts a lot with the multicultural nature of its neighborhood. The postcolonial question asked to theater management is maybe still more difficult to address than the social one: here, saying “everybody is welcome” will not suffice, because “people don’t want to be tolerated, they want to be desired”.¹⁹ The question thus becomes how to elaborate a programming that would not be *for* everybody but *with* everybody, knowing that “we” – educated, white “Westerners” – do not have all the requested cultural, historical resources to solve the equation on our own.

Actually interrogating the practical opening of a theater such as Les Halles de Schaerbeek to its multicultural neighborhood leads to a classical problem of postcolonial ethics: what is a “generic” crowd? Is it a crowd whose cultural, racial, historical singularities are erased in favor of a generic, “universal” figure of individuality? But even if such an abstract, universal individuality could exist, how do we prevent such a figure from molding the features of what has long been thought of as an ideal constant, the one of not so universal people that Deleuze and Guattari describe as “adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language?”²⁰ And if we describe the genericity of the crowd as the conjunction of all the singularities and variances it encompasses, what conceptual and pragmatic frames do we need to make such an idea more than an abstract ideal?

The difficulty of thinking the theatrical crowd in and with its necessary diversity in a postcolonial era appears bluntly in a passage of Badiou’s *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. When quoting Badiou above about the problem of the theater public, I didn’t give the end of the paragraph, which goes as follows:

We have lost the velvet and the gold and the décolletages, without having seen the real crowds come in with their blue collars and their berets, even less the totality of the actual modern proletariat, those profound intellectuals with their unimaginably complex factory lives that are our Moroccans, our Algerians, our Senegalese and our Malians, our Turks, our Yugoslavs, our

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004 [1987]), 105.

Pakistanis, and so forth. Distributive equality has not established its rule over the theatre halls.²¹

Beyond the lack of distributive equality amongst the theatrical crowd, one cannot help but notice the repetition of this strange and disturbing “our” – an “our” that shows the astonishing difficulty not only to make manifest a diverse theatrical crowd but simply to find the right words to talk about it. It is difficult indeed not to think of a colonial benevolence here. Why would the Moroccan or Algerian diasporas be “ours”? And what is the “we” that is implicit here? “We”, white Westerners, facing “them”, former colonized people – migrants, sons and daughters of migrants? If we want the nature of the theatrical crowd to evolve, we not only need to renounce such accounts in terms of “we” and “they” but we also need to acknowledge that our ways of thinking – our conceptual frameworks as well as our theatrical forms – must evolve as well. No more “we” and “they”, no more “inside” and “outside”: our task, in theater as well as in contemporary societies, is to think a “we” that is not centered on a national, homogeneous idea of an idealized common (and thus precluding) origin.²²

When criticizing Nussbaum’s universalism as a concentric cosmopolitanism based on the idea of community as commonality of values, beliefs and norms, Braidotti rather praises a conception of transnational subjects defined by their “restlessness”: “In this shift, a unitary and “home-bound” subject gets redefined in terms of multiple belongings, non-unitary selfhood and constant flows of transformation”.²³ Thinking subjects as transnational, in-the-process beings – whether those subjects are first-generation migrants or white Westerners directing a theater – allows for an account of the genericity of the crowd that is not based on the presupposition of an ideal subject but that makes space available for a polyphonic elaboration of what an inclusive “we” could mean. It is not “we” versus “they” anymore but “‘we’ are in *this* together”.²⁴ When Braidotti writes that we are *in this* together, she means that such a conception of a transnational subject is more efficient to describe a postcolonial sense of global humanity but we should also take the “in this” part literally. We are in various spaces together and the way those spaces are collectively defined or not impacts what we are and

²¹ Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” 230.

²² The “we” and the task that is “ours” can thus only be thought of as minor processes – a “we” defined by its to-come component rather than by its origin. Deleuze famously invoked a “people to come” to describe such a becoming: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 1989), 217-20. See also Janae Sholtz, *The Invention of a People: Heidegger and Deleuze on Art and the Political* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 242.

²³ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

what kind of crowd we constitute.

It is thus not a mere coincidence if the openness or closeness of theaters to their surroundings has led us to such considerations on the nature of the subjects making up a “generic” crowd. As places that constantly play with different types of spaces, with passages from everyday life to representation, from consumerism to spectatorship, from backstage areas to visibility, theaters are materially meant to allow experiments regarding the transformations of subjectivity in a postcolonial era. The *Réouverture des Halles* book makes several suggestions to tackle this question. The most important one is also the simplest: the book suggests that the “direction” of the reopened Halles be a one shared out between four different centers, one of them being entirely devoted to colonial and postcolonial questions. Such an idea sounds basic but is nevertheless urgent, as the French-speaking institutions in Belgium lag behind current postcolonial research being conducted in English-speaking countries or even in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Important archival work could be realized by this pole concerning both local phenomena in postcolonial history and the development of urban music and arts. Moreover, *Réouverture des Halles* also suggests continuing archival work alongside artistic productions: a market selling, amongst other things, fair-trade products from the Maghreb could be held three times a week in the Halles, and a cafeteria should put into light the particular cooking traditions developed by Moroccan and Turkish mothers from the neighborhood. The cafeteria would thus award those culinary traditions “the patrimonial status they deserve as specificities from the North of Brussels.”²⁵

Whether they are of artistic or para-artistic natures (cooking is, literally, an aesthetic experience),²⁶ those postcolonial principles aim at telling everyone, theater-lovers or inhabitants of the surroundings: this is your place, *we are in this together*. The idea that the *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book states firmly is that the opening of such strange buildings as theaters can only be realized through the affirmation and valorization of all kinds of material practices that make up their surroundings. Such an opening cannot only revolve around the theatrical, artistic representation alone; other material practices have determining influence on the assurance of the connection of the theater to its surroundings. Theaters being material buildings that welcome theatrical performances as “material, corporeal, machinic assemblage[s],” the confrontation of such buildings with other material practices does not remove anything from theater but allows its insertion in a complex urban device.²⁷

Now, what would it mean for theatrical creation itself to be conceived and performed with

²⁵ Van Leeuw-Koplewicz, *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*, 19.

²⁶ See *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Richard Shusterman and Adèle Tomlin (New York: Routledge, 2010).

²⁷ Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” 190.

and for a more generic, diverse, postcolonial, “restless” crowd? The theoretic frame furnished by Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* is maybe the most fitting for answering this question. If we cease to consider theater as the place where an abstract “community” of spectators gathers to live a kind of mystic-political experience, we lose a theoretical prestige but we gain a practical access to the multiple experiences that can be conceived and shared through performance. The multiplicity of experiences performers and spectators bring with them (and the more diversified the crowd is, the better) allows for theater to be a demystified place of communication between a whole range of ethical, political and aesthetic experiences. As Rancière argues, “an emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators,” that is to say, a community of diverse interpreters able to translate and narrate the heterogeneous components of their experience to make it an in-the-process transmission of skills to perform, to teach and to learn alternatively.²⁸ Performers are sometimes learning, sometimes teaching, and spectators as well. Combining this approach to the theater public with a postcolonial one is thus the best way to empower the very sharing of experience that constitute a performance and the stories we are able to tell, individually and collectively.

Opening the Stories

We must trust the capacities of all singular spectators to narrate their stories, with and through theater as well as other material practices. That is one major condition to answer the question that runs throughout this paper: “Who is telling what story, and to which public?” Emphasizing the openness of theaters to multiply and enrich the stories we are able to tell collectively from our local, material situations is one of the most important features of the *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek* book. Actually, the transformative power of interwoven stories is not only one of the themes of the book; it is also its *raison d’être*.

Nobody formally asked for this book: it was not ordered by any public authority – and certainly not by the current team working at Les Halles de Schaerbeek. The considerable architectural work that has been furnished was not conceived as a series of instructions for a contractor: once again, no authority is planning to (de)renovate Les Halles. The book is “only” – but it is a lot – a wager on the propositional forces it encloses. It aims at showing that empowerment results from the confidence we should put on our collective capacity to reverse the stories, to create new stories, to believe in their ability to modify our surroundings. The

²⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 22.

book does not want to be a utopia but rather a very concrete set of suggestions that can be practically, materially enacted – first enactments can be found on the project’s website.²⁹ This enactment depends on the performativity of the possibilities told by the book: are they strong enough to become counter-stories, stories that can rehabilitate our collective power to act “outside the black box,” which the abstract idea of theater has too often become? And are we strong enough to continue and appropriate those stories?

By betting on such possible powers of stories, the book inserts itself in the tradition of speculative fabulation – a tradition the book proposes to perpetuate through one of its “directing centers.”³⁰ According to Deleuze, fabulating means engaging in a minor process of invention, in a kind of speech-act that is neither personal nor impersonal but which builds up a collective enunciation in which both the speaker and the people s/he speaks about are altered as they are taken into a common becoming.³¹ Fabulation is thus a kind of story-telling that develops the powers of the false to initiate new becomings. In the words of Gregory Flaxman, fabulation is a kind of sci-fi approach to the fabrication of knowledge, since SF is devoted to the “not yet,” the “otherwise”:

Science fiction launches thought into those domains where, and dimensions in which, we can no longer quantify the world in terms of what we know but, instead, we must create concepts in response to what which “one doesn’t know, or knows badly”.³²

Fabulation brings new dimensions to the world to tackle problems we do not know, or know badly, and such an approach is precisely at the core of what Donna Haraway calls “speculative fabulation”. Speculative fabulation is a kind of narration that brings thoughts that are not mere recognitions of what already exists, but that create more paths toward a more complex account of our relations to the world.³³ Speculative fabulation, with its interwoven storytellings, aims at revisiting our figures of thought and at deploying the hidden possibilities that lie dormant in those figures. Figures, Haraway says, “are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes of knots in which diverse bodies and meanings

²⁹ *Ouverture des Halles* (2015), *Réouverture des Halles / Un lieu pour nous et pour les autres*, unpaginated. Available at: <http://ouverturedeshalles.be>.

³⁰ Van Leeuw-Koplewicz, *Réouverture des Halles de Schaerbeek*, 21.

³¹ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 222.

³² Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy: Powers of the False*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 295.

³³ Donna Haraway, *SF: Speculative Fabulation and String Figures* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 4-5.

coshape one another.”³⁴ Bodies or cyborgs are such material-semiotic figures. And such are theaters, such as Les Halles de Schaerbeek, with their complex entanglement of architectural, social, artistic, politic, commercial, normative, creative, historical dimensions. Working on the very body of such a figure in order to put into light its undeveloped potentialities through textual and architectural suggestions is not getting out of the theater: it is opening it to the multiplicity of stories that it was built to tell.

Conclusion: Geo-Archi-Theater

In the introduction to this paper I pleaded in favor of a more complete account of all the elements that make up a theatrical experience. Accordingly, I have focused on what could seem as side issues when compared to the majesty of pure theater-ideas, that is to say the material, social, architectural and narrative possibilities a theater *building* contains. This plea for a fuller account of the material practices that surrounds theater practice is nevertheless compatible with the defense of theater-ideas. Firstly, as theater thinks “the knot that binds together desire and politics” in order to produce “a public illumination of history and life,” theater-ideas can only be made more vivid by an opening to the otherness that surrounds the theater and makes it possible.³⁵ Secondly, theater always implies a part of chance and the public must be counted in that chanciness – “Only [...] a chance public is worth anything at all.”³⁶ This factor of “chance”, which is also the “genericity” of theatrical realizations can only be reinforced by the way theater buildings are opened to their public in spatial, architectural, social, postcolonial and cultural ways. The architheater is a theater that takes the chance of its materiality and situation to tell further stories.

As Badiou constantly argues, theater has always been an affair of the State.³⁷ The statement is no less true regarding the state of our social democracies than it is of Euripides’s or Molière’s time. Thus, the question “Why would a crowd which does not revolt against flagrant injustices actually constitute itself as a collective subject through the grace of a theatrical summoning?” is as well an affair of the theater as an affair of the State.³⁸ The originality and the power of the *Réouverture des Halles* project is to go and seek in practices that the State arguably does not explore enough: the material arrangements of local and global ele-

³⁴ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

³⁵ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76; Badiou, “Rhapsody for the Theatre,” 189.

³⁸ Badiou and During, “A Theatre of Operations,” 187.

ments that characterize postcolonial, urban contexts where theater and politics can happen. Describing such a frame for thinking and acting requires, according to me, the addition of the prefix “geo-” to the architheater. This “geo-” derives from the concept of *géo-esthétique* (“geo-aesthetics”) coined by the curatorial platform *Le peuple qui manque* (“a people is missing”) to designate the need, in our postcolonial and decolonial era’s artistic practices, for a double spatialization.³⁹ The first spatialization concerns the way works of art are produced in singular spaces and circulate in various spaces where the polarization between highly rated, ‘international’, Western centers and ‘provincialized’, emergent spaces does not work anymore, neither aesthetically nor ethically. The second spatialization applies to the importance space takes in works of art themselves – elements of architecture, geography, cartography and, why not, geophilosophy becoming parts of the narrations and translations the artists perform.⁴⁰ At such a crossroad of possibilities, the figure of geo-archi-theater aims at opening paths for the exploration and narration of alternative, more inclusive futures.

The opening of theater to geo-archi-theater, its will to gather a people that is not there yet, constitutes a difficult, complicated, tiring process. But theater has always been about fatigue, and so has thought. “The public comes to the theater to be struck. Struck by theater-ideas. It does not leave the theater cultivated, but stunned, fatigued (thought is tiring), pen-sive.”⁴¹

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³⁹ *A People is missing, Le peuple qui manque* – curatorial platform, unpaginated. Available at <http://www.lepeuplequimanque.org/en>.

⁴⁰ *Géo-Esthétique*, eds. Quiros and Imhoff, 5.

⁴¹ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 77.

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Badiou en Architecture

Renaud Pleitinx

Introduction

Dans une conférence prononcée en 1997 et publiée sous le titre “Comment parler aujourd’hui de la ville et de l’architecture?” dans le recueil *Pour une anthropologie de l’espace*, Françoise Choay dénonce la mise en circulation de textes dans lesquels des architectes empruntent des concepts à des philosophes pour légitimer leur production architecturale. L’attaque est sévère et porte moins sur le principe de l’emprunt que sur la manière de le restituer.

Apparue en France dans le sillage de Mai 1968 avec l’utilisation de Heidegger et de Foucault, ayant ensuite trouvé sa terre d’élection aux États-Unis, d’où elle nous revient nantie d’une vitalité accrue, la démarche consiste à dépecer les textes élus en y prélevant, au gré

Journal of Badiou Studies 5 :: 2017

ISSN 2049-9027



d'analogies formelles ou anecdotiques, des concepts et des fragments qui, une fois décontextualisés, c'est-à-dire désémantiser, sont projetés dans un domaine étranger: voir les aventures de la 'déconstruction' heideggérienne, popularisée par Derrida, ou encore de "l'espace public" habermassien. L'architecte Peter Eisenman est sans doute la figure emblématique de cette démarche de légitimation. Aussi éclectique dans le choix de ses idoles qu'approximatif, ou même erratique, dans la lecture de leurs écrits, il a successivement invoqué l'autorité de Chomsky au début des années 1970, puis celles de Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Habermas. Aujourd'hui, Hanna Arendt est au zénith et voici venir le temps des Gilles Deleuze et Michel de Certeau.¹

Dans une note de bas page, Françoise Choay ajoute un commentaire : "Neuf ans plus tard, la situation n'a pas changé. Le nouveau gourou est maintenant Alain Badiou. Cf. "Weaponized Thought. Ethical Militance and the Group-Subject", article anthologique d'Emily Apter dans la revue américaine *Grey Room* ("consacrée à la théorisation de l'architecture moderne et contemporaine"), MIT press, 14 (2004) 7-23. Cf. aussi les travaux théoriques de l'école d'architecture de Louvain-la-Neuve."²

Ce commentaire est pour le moins déplacé et malheureux. Déplacé d'abord parce que l'article et les travaux auxquels il renvoie sont hors de cause et de propos. L'article d'Emily Apter en effet ne parle nullement d'architecture et ne légitime aucune des productions de son auteure, qui d'ailleurs n'est pas architecte, mais Professeure de français et de littérature comparée à la New York University. La référence aux 'travaux théoriques de l'école d'architecture de Louvain-la-Neuve' n'est, quant à elle, pas plus justifiée; aucun des programmes de recherche en Théorie de l'architecture conduits au sein de l'institution visée ne s'est proposé d'exploiter systématiquement l'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou, et aucun des chercheurs mis en cause n'a commis l'erreur de convoquer les catégories du philosophe pour justifier ses propres travaux d'architecte. Mais, le commentaire de Françoise Choay est aussi malheureux, car il disqualifie implicitement l'intérêt que des architectes pourraient nourrir à l'égard du propos philosophique d'Alain Badiou, réduit sans ménagement au statut de 'gourou'.

Contre un avis aussi peu fondé que défavorable, cet article a pour ambition de dire en quoi l'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou peut à bon droit intéresser les architectes et leur fournir à l'occasion des catégories adéquates à la description de leur pratique. Pour ce faire, nous discuterons, dans un premier temps, la légitimité et l'opportunité d'une application de

¹ Françoise Choay, *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 113-4.

² Ibid., 114.

la philosophie d'Alain Badiou à l'architecture. Nous montrerons, dans un second temps, que celle-ci permet, au travers de la catégorie de procédure générique, de décrire et d'attester une pratique particulière et exceptionnelle, nommément générique, du projet d'architecture.

Philosophie Badiouienne et Champ Architectural

À destination des lecteurs les moins familiarisés avec l'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou, il convient d'en présenter brièvement l'enjeu et les thèmes principaux. L'enjeu majeur de l'entreprise philosophique d'Alain Badiou est d'attester, contre tout relativisme, l'existence de vérités. Pour mieux reconnaître leur actualité historique, Alain Badiou propose dans son œuvre philosophique une conceptualisation systématique du processus par lequel des vérités adviennent, en définissant et décrivant les instances et les opérations nécessaires à leur production. Distribué dans les deux maîtres ouvrages du philosophe: *L'être et l'événement* (1988) et *Logiques des mondes* (2006), le propos philosophique d'Alain Badiou se laisse diviser de manière somme toute classique en deux volets complémentaires: l'un que nous qualifierons de métaphysique, l'autre d'éthique. Le volet métaphysique, qui comprend l'Ontologie du multiple (*L'être et l'événement*) et la Grande Logique (*Logiques des mondes*), s'attache à décrire les situations ou les mondes, selon la perspective adoptée, au sein desquels apparaissent des vérités.³ Le volet éthique, qui comprend une Théorie du Sujet (*L'être et l'événement*) et une Théorie des points (*Logiques des mondes*), est quant à lui consacré à la description des processus qui trouvant leur origine dans un événement, engageant les décisions de sujets et conduisent à l'épanouissement de vérités.

S'agissant, dans un premier temps, de discuter de la légitimité et de l'opportunité d'une application de la philosophie badiouienne au champ de l'architecture, il importe de remarquer d'emblée qu'Alain Badiou ne parle pas d'architecture. Ceci doit s'entendre de deux manières. D'abord, l'architecture n'est pas l'objet désigné du propos du philosophe, lequel se concentre sur les thèmes métaphysiques et éthiques précédemment énoncés. Ensuite, l'architecture ne compte pas parmi les arts que Badiou convoque régulièrement pour illustrer ou valider son propos, tels que le théâtre, la poésie, la musique, la peinture voire le cinéma. Le thème de l'architecture est en effet très rarement abordé dans l'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou et toujours de manière incidente. Dans *Le Siècle*, illustrant le désir universaliste caractéristique du XXe siècle, Badiou évoque brièvement "le Bauhaus en architecture, un bâtiment que rien ne particularise, car il est ramené à une fonctionnalité translucide, uni-

³ Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes: L'être et l'événement*, 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

versellement reconnaissable et oublieuse de toute particularité stylistique.”⁴ Dans *Logiques des mondes*, en guise d’illustration du concept de localisation, Badiou décrit en des termes proprement topologiques, la composition de la ville de Brasilia.⁵ Notoirement donc, l’architecture ne fait pas partie des priorités discursives du philosophe.

Cet état de fait, que nous ne cherchons pas à expliquer, n’implique pas que la philosophie badiousienne ne puisse en droit s’appliquer à l’architecture. Au contraire, il faut s’aviser que le propos philosophique d’Alain Badiou, qui se caractérise par un degré maximal de généralité conceptuelle, inclut nécessairement l’architecture. D’une part, les catégories ontologiques et phénoménologiques de multiple ou d’objet, définies par Alain Badiou, subsument respectivement toute chose réputée être ou dont l’être est situé. Dans la mesure où l’architecture et son produit, l’habitat, satisfont à cette exigence minimale, ils sont inclus, au titre de cas particuliers, dans les domaines de définition du multiple et de l’objet. Les thèses de l’Ontologie du multiple et de la Grande Logique, qui décrivent les propriétés générales de ces entités, sont donc de pleins droits applicables à l’architecture et à l’habitat. D’autre part, les catégories proposées par Alain Badiou dans le volet éthique de son œuvre philosophique décrivent un processus pouvant avoir lieu dans des domaines aussi différents que la science, l’art, la politique et l’amour. Dans la mesure où l’architecture, en tant que production de l’habitat, appartient à la catégorie des arts, elle est de fait comprise dans les objets visés par l’éthique badiousienne. Ainsi, l’application dans le champ architectural des catégories métaphysiques et éthiques de la philosophie d’Alain Badiou est-elle parfaitement légitime.

Cependant, il faut constater que les catégories philosophiques forgées par Alain Badiou ne permettent pas de rendre un compte précis de l’architecture, entendue strictement ici comme production de l’habitat. D’une part en effet, l’Ontologie et la Grande logique ne fournissent pas de concepts propres à approfondir la compréhension de l’architecture et de son produit l’habitat. Les catégories métaphysiques définies par Alain Badiou négligent en effet, par le fait même de leur généralité, les propriétés particulières des multiples ou des objets que sont l’architecture et l’habitat. Inefficaces à ce degré précision, elles ne permettent ni d’explicitier les subtils ressorts artistiques de l’architecture, ni d’épuiser l’analyse d’un corpus d’habitat donné. D’autre part, les catégories de l’éthique badiousienne ne sont pas plus adéquates à rendre compte de l’architecture en tant que telle. En effet, leur vocation est de décrire les instances d’un processus essentiellement décisionnel. C’est en effet, selon Alain Badiou, par l’opération de décisions successives qu’adviennent les vérités. La décision

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 227.

⁵ Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes*, 433-6.

occupe à vrai dire une place cruciale dans le dispositif conceptuel d'Alain Badiou qui s'apparente sous cet aspect à une théorie de la décision militante. Celui-ci rend compte en effet d'une modalité particulière de la décision, caractérisée par des conditions événementielles, une subjectivité militante, et des effets de vérité. Cette position centrale qu'occupe la décision confère à l'éthique badiouienne un point de vue optatif qui détermine la nature des objets qu'elle est susceptible de prendre en considération. Envisagés dans la perspective de l'éthique badiouienne, les domaines de la science, de l'art, de la politique, et de l'amour ne sont pas considérés pour eux-mêmes ni en eux-mêmes, mais en tant que lieux de décision. Ce biais implique que les déterminismes propres à la science, à l'art, à la politique, et à l'amour, dont l'explication nécessite un appareillage hypothétique et conceptuel adapté, demeurent en deçà du pouvoir d'élucidation des catégories de l'éthique badiouienne. Appliquées en particulier à l'architecture, ces dernières ne sont finalement d'aucun secours pour expliciter les fins rouages de la production de l'habitat. Ainsi donc, la philosophie badiouienne, alors même qu'elle inclut l'architecture dans son domaine de pertinence, ne permet-elle pas de comprendre et de décrire l'architecture, entendue strictement comme production de l'habitat.

Néanmoins, l'exploitation des thèses philosophiques d'Alain Badiou dans le champ de l'architecture reste opportune. Appropriées à la description d'un processus décisionnel, les catégories de l'éthique badiouienne se révèlent adéquates pour rendre compte, non pas de l'architecture, mais d'une modalité du 'projet d'architecture', compris ici comme le processus délibératif qui oriente et informe la production de l'habitat. C'est en effet en ce point du domaine architectural, où l'habitat se décrète, qu'elles s'appliquent avec un bénéfice heuristique maximal.

Ceci justifie que des architectes, dont la tâche socialement assignée est moins de produire des habitats que d'établir des projets d'architecture, s'intéressent à l'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou et convoquent à l'occasion ses catégories.

Procédures génériques et projet d'architecture

Ayant établi la légitimité et l'opportunité d'une application de l'éthique badiouienne non pas à l'architecture proprement dite, mais au projet d'architecture, défini comme le processus décisionnel prenant la production de l'habitat pour objet, nous montrerons que celle-ci permet de rendre compte, au travers de la catégorie de procédure générique, d'une pratique militante du projet d'architecture et partant d'attester l'existence de vérités architecturales.

Selon Alain Badiou, les vérités résultent de processus que désignent les termes de procédures générique. Pour comprendre le sens que Badiou accorde à cette expression, il convient de définir les termes de monde, d'événement, de sujet, d'enquête (point) et de vérité que la catégorie de procédure générique associe et intègre conceptuellement. Défini dans la Grande Logique, le concept de monde fait référence de manière générale au lieu de la procédure générique, lequel inclut des objets, des multiples situés, ainsi que les règles (plus proprement, le transcendantal) qui gouvernent leur apparition, leur prise en compte dans ce monde. Un événement est la condition d'une procédure générique autant que son point d'origine. Il consiste en l'irruption dans un monde de ce qui, selon les lois (le transcendantal) de ce monde, n'y apparaissait pas, n'y comptait pour rien. Le terme "sujet" désigne l'agent, indifféremment individuel ou collectif, de la procédure générique. L'enquête quant à elle est l'opération de la procédure générique qui consiste essentiellement en une décision visant à établir l'appartenance de tel objet du monde à l'ensemble des conséquences de l'événement. La vérité, enfin, est le résultat de la procédure générique. Elle se définit en termes badiouisiens comme la série potentiellement infinie des enquêtes postévénementielles, dont la collection constitue un ensemble d'objets qui finalement se révèle, au regard de monde, hétéroclite et inédit. En résumé, une procédure générique est un processus par lequel une vérité advient dans un monde, mettant au jour une nouveauté radicale qui bouleverse les lois de ce monde. Elle a pour condition l'irruption fugitive d'un événement et son aboutissement dépend de l'aptitude d'un sujet à poursuivre les enquêtes constitutives d'une vérité.

En proposant une compréhension du processus par lequel des vérités adviennent, Alain Badiou fournit les critères permettant d'en reconnaître empiriquement les conditions, les opérations ainsi que les agents effectifs, et ainsi d'attester l'existence de procédures génériques et de vérités. Régulièrement, exploitant les ressources conceptuelles de son système, le philosophe isole et donne en exemple des cas de procédure générique avérés: en science, la construction de la Théorie des ensembles initiée par Cantor, la démonstration du Théorème de Gödel; en art, l'invention de la musique dodécaphonique, l'abstraction de la peinture ; en politique, la révolution des esclaves conduite par Spartacus, la Commune de Paris, Mai 68, la Révolution culturelle; en amour, les passions d'Énée et Didon, de Tristan et Iseult.

S'agissant d'appliquer la catégorie de procédure générique au projet d'architecture, il convient d'abord de préciser ce que désigne, dans le domaine de l'architecture, les termes qui la définissent. Lieu de la procédure générique, un monde architectural comprend autant les structures formelles que mobilise usuellement l'architecture, à savoir: l'ensemble des

types et des éléments de construction, des modes et des positions d'habitation, que les paramètres conjoncturels auxquels la production de l'habitat réfère conventionnellement, à savoir: les constructeurs, les habitants, les matériaux, les destinations de l'ouvrage, le terrain à bâtir. Point de départ d'une procédure générique, un événement architectural consiste en la mise à jour ou en l'apparition dans un monde architectural d'une forme ou d'une chose réputée ne pas apparaître ou ne compter pour rien dans ce monde. Dans l'ordre des formes, il peut s'agir de types et d'éléments de construction inusités, de modes d'habitation alternatifs, mais aussi d'agencements ou de compositions dépréciés. Dans l'ordre des choses, il peut s'agir d'habitants déconsidérés, de constructeurs inhabituels, d'affectations programmatiques marginales, de matériaux réputés indignes, de configurations parcellaires ou territoriales restées latentes. Participe d'un sujet d'architecture toute personne, mise en position de décider de l'exécution ou de l'occupation de l'habitat, qui se montre fidèle à un événement architectural. Il peut s'agir d'un architecte inventif, d'un entrepreneur attentif, d'un maître d'ouvrage lucide, d'un habitant résolu, d'un critique perspicace, voire d'un promoteur suicidaire. Une enquête architecturale correspond au moment de la décision visant à établir l'appartenance de telle forme, de telle chose voire de telle formule architecturale à l'ensemble des conséquences de l'événement. Enfin, une vérité architecturale s'identifie à l'ensemble des décisions conséquentes à l'événement qui gouvernent la production d'un habitat inédit.

Appliquée au champ architectural, la catégorie de procédure générique permet de rendre compte d'un régime particulier du projet d'architecture. Elle ne permet pas en effet de décrire le projet d'architecture en général, mais seulement les cas particuliers et exceptionnels, proprement génériques, où le processus de décision qui informe l'habitat est tout entier suspendu à la survenue hasardeuse d'un événement, garanti par la fidélité fragile d'un sujet, et producteur d'une nouveauté radicale.

Cependant, la catégorie de procédure générique, appliquée au projet d'architecture, reste susceptible de deux interprétations non contradictoires et éventuellement combinables que nous qualifierons distinctement d'"étendue" et de "restreinte." L'interprétation "étendue" de la catégorie de procédure générique accorde le statut d'enquête à des projets d'architecture distincts. Elle considère en effet que des projets procédant de commandes séparées sont les occasions d'une mise à l'épreuve d'un même événement inaugural. L'interprétation "restreinte" en revanche accorde le statut de procédure générique à un projet singulier. En pareil cas, ce projet s'identifie tout entier à une procédure générique et chaque point de décision interne au projet est assimilable à une enquête au sens qu'Alain Badiou accorde à ce mot. Envisagé sous l'angle de l'éthique badiouienne, le projet

d'architecture peut ainsi se concevoir soit comme un des points décisifs d'une procédure générique soit comme une procédure générique en soi.

Finalement, l'attestation historique de vérités architecturales dépend de l'interprétation étendue ou restreinte que l'on se donne de la catégorie de procédure générique. L'interprétation étendue permet de reconnaître dans l'histoire l'existence de "séquences" génériques d'architecture. Par exemple, la séquence historique de l'Architecture Moderne peut, au regard des catégories badioussiennes, être considérée comme une authentique procédure générique. Tous les termes qui la définissent se retrouvent en effet dans l'épopée du Mouvement Moderne. Il y a d'abord, le monde architectural européen de l'immédiat après-guerre où un académisme moribond continue de prescrire le bon usage de registres formels appartenant à des styles éculés et la prise en compte de paramètres conjoncturels obsolètes. Il y a ensuite, l'événement architectural que l'on peut reconnaître autant dans la (re-)découverte de la compatibilité du béton et de l'acier, dans l'invention de la peinture abstraite, que dans l'émergence de paramètres fonctionnels ou sociaux jusqu'alors déconsidérés. Il y a en outre, le sujet architectural constitué par ceux qui se sont réclamés du Mouvement Moderne et ont participé aux premiers Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), avec en tête de proue Walter Gropius et Le Corbusier, militants farouches de la cause moderne. Mais il y a aussi, les enquêtes architecturales que sont les projets d'architecture moderne, esquissés ou exécutés, qui s'attachent à déduire les conséquences de l'événement architectural sur la manière de produire l'habitat. Et enfin, il y a la vérité architecturale propre à la modernité, qui par-delà les enquêtes particulières, consiste en la re-fonte du registre formel de l'architecture, des dispositifs et des spatialités convenues, et à une réévaluation des paramètres conjoncturels pertinents. La parfaite coïncidence entre la séquence de l'architecture moderne et la définition de la procédure générique justifie sans doute le fait que les rares exemples architecturaux cités par Alain Badiou appartiennent à cette séquence.

En revanche, l'interprétation "restreinte" de la procédure de vérité architecturale permet d'attester l'existence, non pas de séquences historiques, mais de "moments" d'architecture générique, plus confidentiels par définition. Toutes les caractéristiques définitoires de la procédure générique s'y retrouvent à nouveau quoi que, à moindre échelle, dans les limites strictes d'un unique projet. Selon une telle interprétation, le monde architectural se réduit alors aux termes d'une commande fixant les conditions (lieux, époque) et les paramètres conjoncturels (constructeur, terrain à bâtir, budget, habitant, matériaux...) de l'habitat à produire. En ce cas, l'événement est une possibilité formelle ou conjoncturelle rencontrée dans l'amas des données collectées et des formules envisagées. Le sujet en l'occurrence est constitué par

les personnes associées directement aux décisions du projet qui se laissent intriguer par l'éventualité dégagée. Chacune des décisions prises par ce sujet unanime est alors assimilable à une enquête. Laquelle a pour enjeu de décider si telle forme, telle chose ou telle formule d'habitat proposée appartient bien à l'ensemble des conséquences de la possibilité entraperçue. La somme infinie de ces décisions constitue peu à peu la vérité du projet, ou plus particulièrement son Idée, et conduit finalement à la production d'un habitat inattendu aux yeux mêmes de leurs auteurs.

Appliqué au domaine de l'architecture, le volet éthique de la philosophie d'Alain Badiou fournit ainsi les concepts adéquats pour repérer et reconnaître dans l'histoire et dans la pratique quotidienne du projet d'architecture des "séquences" et des "moments", éminemment singuliers, où quelques-uns s'affranchissent des déterminations culturelles qui pèsent arbitrairement et conventionnellement sur la production de l'habitat pour inventer une architecture, une manière de produire l'habitat, inédite au regard de l'histoire de l'architecture ou de ses auteurs. Ce faisant, il permet d'attester qu'il y a eu des vérités en architecture, et autorise à penser qu'il peut y en avoir encore.

Conclusion

L'œuvre philosophique d'Alain Badiou dispose, à nos yeux, les catégories fondamentales d'une authentique anthropologie des révolutions. Tandis que l'anthropologie classique se donne les concepts adéquats pour révéler les structures sous-jacentes de faits culturels qui se caractérisent par leur permanence, la philosophie badiouienne ouvre à une analyse des séquences historiques ou des moments existentiels, proprement révolutionnaires, qui impliquent un bouleversement des structures et des systèmes en vigueur, et conduit à leur rénovation. Mais, si le motif principal de la philosophie d'Alain Badiou est, comme nous y avons insisté, de comprendre la genèse des vérités pour mieux en manifester l'existence, il reste possible, en passant de la description à la prescription, de dériver de ses thèses des "maximes" susceptibles d'orienter une pratique militante de la science, de l'art, de la politique, de l'amour, et enfin du projet d'architecture.

Dans la conclusion de *Logiques des mondes*, Alain Badiou énonce cette "première directive philosophique" qui s'adresse moins au sujet constitué qu'aux candidats sujets: "Prends soin de ce qui naît. Interroge les éclats, sonde leur passé sans gloire. Tu ne peux espérer qu'en ce qui inapparaissait."⁶ Cette directive invite tout un chacun à guetter active-

⁶ Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes*, 529.

ment l'événement à venir. Or, tout événement, au dire d'Alain Badiou, provient d'une partie des situations ou des mondes dénommée le site événementiel. Le site événementiel, qualifié par ailleurs d'au bord du vide et de fondateur, est le lieu où se tiennent les multiples ou les objets qui appartiennent de fait à une situation ou un monde, mais n'y comptent pour rien ou n'y apparaissent pas. La "première directive philosophique" contient donc une recommandation implicite, celle de côtoyer le vide et de prendre garde à l'inexistant. En architecture, cela veut dire simplement prêter attention aux formes et aux choses qui, dans l'histoire de l'habitat (procédure étendue) ou dans les termes d'une commande (procédure restreinte), passent pour n'avoir aucune importance ni aucune pertinence. C'est, finalement, aux formes exclues des registres conventionnels et aux choses omises par les spécifications courantes qu'Alain Badiou nous enjoint de nous intéresser dès à présent. Ceci, ultimement, pour avoir la chance de vivre, comme sujet, l'exaltation d'une séquence ou d'un moment générique d'architecture.

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Dispositions au pas du Réel

Marc Belderbos

Badiou n'a pas Traité de l'Architecture En Soi. Les quelques pages dans *Logiques des Mondes* prenant motif de Brasilia sont là, à ce moment de développement de son livre, pour traiter de 'l'intérieur', de 'l'inclusion', de 'points', mais sûrement pas pour cerner l'opération de l'architecture ni ce qui la provoque.

On ne peut donc étudier une pensée badiouienne de l'architecture, ni par conséquent ce que cette architecture pourrait être pour le théâtre. Badiou lui-même a d'ailleurs déjà dit qu'il n'avait jamais traité l'architecture. Par contre Badiou, pour le théâtre exige un 'lieu' comme élément 'obligé du théâtre': "Lieu, texte ou son tenant lieu, metteur en scène, acteurs décor,



costumes, public sont les sept éléments obligés du théâtre”.¹

Badiou dit donc qu’il faut un ‘lieu’. Il ne dit pas qu’il faut un ‘endroit’, ou un emplacement, ou une ‘place’ ou ‘de la place’. Il ne dit pas que ce lieu est un site, ni un site d’un événement....Non, il utilise le mot ‘lieu’.

De plus le ‘lieu’ dont il parle n’est jamais présenté et développé comme un lieu architectural....Jamais il ne parle non plus d’une éventuelle figure du lieu...ou d’une apparence du lieu.

D’ailleurs très simplement, Badiou ne dit rien du lieu pour le théâtre, mis à part qu’il en dit la nécessité comme ‘élément’. Et donc rien de ce que le lieu apporte au théâtre. Car il ne dit pas que le lieu est un ‘instrument’. Il dit que c’est un ‘élément’. Un élément obligé.

Je dois ici ajouter à cela que j’ai personnellement demandé à Badiou, verbalement en un court aparté, si je pouvais trouver dans son œuvre une maxime du ‘lieu’. Il m’a répondu qu’il ne le pensait pas. J’ai un peu poussé en lui demandant ce qu’il pensait de la formule d’Heidegger ‘le lieu est ce qui rassemble sur soi l’être d’une chose’. Il m’a répondu immédiatement que là il s’agissait de ‘l’être d’une ‘chose’ et que, lui, il ne traitait pas de ‘lieu d’une ‘chose’’, mais que ce qui l’occupait c’était le lieu d’une procédure de vérité....

Plus tard, je me suis demandé si ‘lieu’, lorsque ce n’est pas un endroit, ni une position, ni un place, ni une situation ni un site,...si donc ‘lieu’ n’était pas toujours ‘lieu’ d’une procédure de vérité....Il me semble que, en architecture, le ‘lieu’ a toujours cette signification, sauf à être sans intérêt....

Et le l’architecture est affaire de ‘lieu’.

Mais ici nous ne pouvons démontrer cela, nous ne pouvons que y laisser penser....



Alors ici nous prenons parti. Ce petit article proposera d’aller à l’*‘arké’* (l’*‘arké’* d’*‘arké’*-tecture) et de voir, là, si une conjecture pourrait se faire qui puisse simplement être l’idée de Badiou sur cet élément ‘lieu’ du théâtre’.

¹ Alain Badiou, *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 228.

Disons simplement que nous le ferons par un petit glissement, que nous disons 'glissement vers l'arké' en remplaçant, pour l'instant de cet article, la notion de 'lieu architectural' par 'lieu matériel' en essayant d'indiquer que ce glissement engagera à considérer, non quelles figures composées puissent être adéquates au théâtre tel que pensé par Badiou, mais qu'une inaugurale disposition de la matière ait cette fonction d'élément nécessaire à ce qu'il puisse y avoir théâtre, ou à ce que le théâtre puisse avoir lieu....

Disposition élémentaire, primitive, inaugurale, trace d'un premier geste non encore acte, d'un arké-geste précédant tout, sur le Réel avant toute réalité avant toute affirmation ou interrogation qui y trouvera refuge dans cette disposition juste hors Réel dans la toute première distinction d'un intérieur et d'un extérieur dans une disposition de matières qui s'ont.



Dans de *Logiques des Mondes*, Badiou écrit:

[....] La loi mondaine des multiplicités est d'apparaître en un lieu. On ne s'étonnera donc pas que l'idée abstraite du lieu – la distinction entre intérieur et extérieur, les espaces topologiques – soit intrinsèquement liées à la structure transcendantale qui règle les intensités d'apparition. Que les points d'un monde (d'un transcendantal) composent un espace topo-logique est une idée plus précise et plus étonnante. Sa signification générale est la suivante: là où l'infinité des nuances qualitatives d'un monde comparaît devant l'instance du Deux – la figure phénoménale d'une décision anonyme --, là réside, concentrée, la puissance de localisation de ce monde [...].²

Badiou dit donc:

Le lieu est avancé par une idée....

Le lieu a une idée....

Le lieu a une idée de l'apparition....

L'idée du lieu est, avant tout, la 'distinction'.

Distinction entre intérieur et extérieur. Pas pour autant opposition entre intérieur et extérieur; pas séparation entre intérieur et extérieur; pas scission entre intérieur et extérieur; pas

² Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes: L'être et l'événement*, 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 437.

d'enclos d'un intérieur, pas d'extérieur hors lieu; pas partition d'un intérieur et d'un extérieur....Non, une simple distinction.

Il y a de l'intérieur et il y a de l'extérieur...qui ont une certaine forme d'être ensemble ou une certaine forme de 's'avoir' mutuellement.

Le lieu a une idée: les espaces topologiques. On note que 'espace topologique' est un pléonasme car l'espace est un 'ensemble' muni d'une topologie.

Mais cela veut dire ceci: quand les points d'un ensemble forment ou sont munis d'une topologie, alors ces points s'ont.

Il y a préalablement à tout, et avant l'Être même, un 'avoir'.

Les points, les fragments, s'ont mutuellement en une figure phénoménale que l'humain infini voit en une décision anonyme, c'est dire qu'il n'est pas l'auteur de ce 'voir' et de ce 's'avoir'. Ou disons qu'il en est l'auteur intime qui ne se sait pas.

Les points s'ont.

Et, suivant le degré de cet 'avoir', ils ont un degré d'apparition que je tente de penser comme degré d'être.

Ou, suivant combien les points d'une multiplicité s'ont, cette multiplicité 'est'...en intensité comme en 'complétude' ou en cohésion physique et temporelle.

'Être' est un résultat de l''avoir'....

'Être' est la cohésion de l''avoir'....

La forme de l''avoir', -c'est à dire comment le corps se trouve muni d'une topologie, qui 'tient'...,qui 'a'..., créant un intérieur dans un extérieur – est l'Être.

La 'multiplicité Badiou' dit cette idée...de *Logiques des Mondes*:

J'ai souvent imaginé, quand je me dissolvais, le soir, à travers les baies d'un appartement

de l'aile sud de Brasilia, dans la clarté étale du ciel, que la cartographie des signes stellaires, dont les mouvements de la ville semblaient le décalque terrestre, m'annonçaient que j'étais là pour toujours. L'oiseau posé sur le sol sec, les lagunes lunaires, les bétons stylés de Niemeyer: tous me disaient qu'ainsi ouverts, les fragments de Brasilia, m'orientant dans la nuit, m'avaient incorporé à la naissance d'un nouveau monde.³

On voit donc la 'multiplicité Badiou' se dissoudre...où? Le soir dans la clarté du ciel. Dans l'immatériel donc.

Et après s'être dissous ou s'être dé-sidéré-, la 'multiplicité Badiou' se porte à 'voir' deux images: L'image d'être là pour toujours et l'image d'avoir été incorporé à un nouveau monde par les fragments, les points, de Brasilia...par cette topologie-là par cet 'intérieur' de Brasilia dans un extérieur lié (ciel, signes stellaires cartographiés...).

Tout cet avoir, d'une topologie avec un intérieur lié à un extérieur, lui annonçait qu'il était...et qu'il était là...et pour toujours....

Et bien cela, -'Annoncer l'être'-, est ce que je nomme 'l'inaugural'. L'inaugural de l'architecture. Ou le commencement...(pas l' 'origine'....pas le début...).

Il est incorporé à la naissance d'un nouveau monde. Pas à un nouveau monde mais à la naissance d'un nouveau monde. La naissance n'est pas une origine, elle est un commencement, orienté, hors de la nuit, dans la clarté....

Avoir, se tenir de cela, avoir sans posséder, les fragments orientant....C'est à dire avoir la topologie d'un intérieur dans et avec un extérieur, voilà ce que j'appelle l'inaugural. L'inaugural de l'être. Avoir est l'inaugural de l'être.

Et on voit bien qu'il n'y a rien avant cette annonce de l'Être.

Elle se fait dans la nuit,
avant l'Être,

³ Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes*, 436.

et elle donne une orientation, c'est à dire qu'elle dit d'où vient la lumière (Orientation n'est pas direction) et annonce la lumière.

Et on voit bien que cette annonce de l'Être est exclusivement matérielle. Elle se fait d'une disposition de matières. Et même plutôt de la disposition que des matières.

Cette annonce de l'Être est de disposition de matière et n'a aucune figure. Oiseau posé sur le sol, lagune, bétons stylés...sont des fragments c'est à dire des parts de structure disposés en topologie,

Fragments matériels...et premiers....Avant eux il n'y a rien...si ce n'est le réel sans réalité. Cet ensemble matériel de topologie et d'intérieur, dans et avec un extérieur est ce que j'appelle la 'disposition de la matière'. Et non une composition de figures.

L'annonce de l'Être se fait par la disposition de matières, et non la composition de figures. La disposition et non la composition.

La composition de figures, historiquement, était bonne pour le 'face à face' au sujet a priori, cartésien.

La disposition de matières est pour le sujet nouveau, Lacanien non central à lui-même qui, dissous, désiré 'dans la clarté du ciel étale' ou dissous, désiré dans le réel non encore réalité, est annoncé, est inauguré, ou vient à être par un intérieur dans un extérieur et une topologie de cet intérieur.

Et cette disposition de matières a une intention – '*avoir lieu pour toujours*' – créée par la vue, transformée en vision imaginée par ce sujet, non mortel et fini cartésien, mais immortel et in-fini ou Badiouien, qu'il est là pour toujours. Car – je récite Badiou – "exposée aux points, (intérieur et topologie), une vérité qui se soutient d'un corps, (sujet in-fini et immortel) apparaît véritablement dans un monde comme s'il était de toujours, son lieu."⁴

'Avoir lieu' dans ce sens devient être.

⁴ Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes*, 436.

'Avoir lieu' pour toujours, de par un monde qui est de toujours ce lieu est ce que je nommerais le 'bien-être'.

La disposition de la matière est là pour le bien-être, pour '*l'avoir lieu pour toujours*' du sujet, d'abord en sujétion de la disposition des matières puis en Sujet 'maître in-fini devenant infini et immortel'.



Précisons encore cette 'procédure ou cette opération', nommée Architecture.

Il faut en dire qu'elle est sur le Réel -ou mieux: au pas du Réel- et non dans la Réalité.

A relire l'extrait ci-dessus de Badiou se dissolvant et laissant, sans en être l'auteur conscient, les points, les fragments, l'intérieur, la topologie l'orienter dans la nuit et l'incorporer à la naissance d'un nouveau monde, on sent bien que cette disposition de matières est sur fond informe ou simplement plat c'est dire sur le Réel sans réalité. Cette disposition est première, c'est à dire au pas du Réel non composé en réalité.

Le lieu est de cette disposition de matières au pas du réel non composé en réalité.



Précisons enfin ceci: cette disposition de matières pour le Sujet in-fini au pas Réel aboutit à la forme. Alors que la composition dans et avec la réalité, pour le sujet cartésien, aboutit à des figures d'habitude nommées à juste titre figures de style.

La 'forme' est le jeu entre la matière et le Réel pour le sujet en sujétion devenant Sujet maître in-fini.

La forme est dans ou sur le réel ou mieux: au pas du Réel.

La 'figure' est de la réalité et dans la réalité comme la sophistique. Elle se fait de ce qu'il y a déjà. Comme le sujet cartésien dont le 'je' est déjà là avant qu'il pense et avant qu'il ne soit.



Nous suggérons alors ici une maxime que j'aime appeler une infinité de l'Architecture opposée aux définitions des âges anciens.

Infinité de l'Architecture:

L'Architecture

établit

au pas du Réel

une première dis-position de matières

– dis-position appelée espace –

pour le bien-être du sujet en sujétion devenant par elle Sujet in-fini.

Cette infinité dans le réel

s'oppose à présent

à toute définition de l'architecture,

dont la plus connue est.

L'architecture est

le jeu

correct savant et magnifique

des volumes

assemblés sous la lumière.

Définition dont on voit bien qu'elle traite l'architecture d'être dans la Réalité d'un 'Homme' préétabli qui préexiste à l'architecture et l'établit, lui, en jeu de volumes (mondes fermés finis où intérieurs finis et extérieurs infinis s'opposent et se font face). On voit que cette conception de l'architecture est de la Réalité pour un Homme de la Réalité.

Cette architecture n'indique même pas qu'elle est là pour l'humain puisqu'elle est faite par 'l'Homme', à présent mort, qui l'a établie sachant ce qui est correct, se considérant savant et établissant le magnifique.



De tout cela découle qu'il y a

une architecture
dans la réalité,
de figures composées
pour un 'Homme'
se croyant préexistant a priori

et

une Architecture
au pas du Réel,
de matière disposée
pour l'éthique ou la tenue du sujet devenant Sujet

Distinction immédiatement parallèle à celle que fait Badiou
entre théâtre et Théâtre
avec donc 't' et 'T'.

théâtre dans la réalité,
fait de composition
de figures existantes
dans le confort bien connu
d'un 'Homme'
se croyant préexistant a priori
au milieu ou face
à des variations talentueuses
du déjà connu
pour des spectateurs
(petit 's').

et

Théâtre au pas du Réel,
de disposition
de matières théâtrale,
textes et acteurs,

en vertu éthique d'inauguration d'une tenue non encore advenue,
et visitant cette inauguration à chaque représentation
pour des Spectateurs
(grand 'S').

Alors....

Où est l'Architecture?: au pas du Réel.

Où est l'architecture?: dans la réalité.

Où est le Théâtre?: au pas du Réel.

Où est le théâtre?: dans la réalité.

On peut alors, pour ceux qui ont lu *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre*, revoir cela, - ici sûrement non exhaustivement – à l'aune de quelques citations.

Badiou écrit:

J'appelle Théâtre, sans guillemets, une production qui machine les sept éléments constitutifs de toute analytique du théâtre ('Lieu, texte ou son tenant lieu, metteur en scène, acteurs décor, costumes, public') de telle sorte qu'elle se prononce sur elle-même et sur le monde, et que le nœud de ce double examen convoque le spectateur à l'impasse d'une pensée.⁵

Où est l'impasse d'une pensée?

au Réel!....Quand on arrive au Réel! sur lequel faire se tenir cette pensée.

Au bord du gouffre...remplacé par cette pensée.

Il est clair que le théâtre avec petit 't' ne fait pas cela. Il remue et recompose des figures reconnaissables et déjà existantes.

J'ajoute aussi que Spectateur est celui qui voit. Ceci est à combiner avec la notion de théâtre même dont l'étymologie est 'Du Latin *theatrum*, et venant du grec *theatron*, et du verbe *theasthai* signifiant voir 'être témoin' et du suffixe 'tron' (*τρον*) dénotant un lieu, un

⁵ Badiou, *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre*, 41.

endroit. En grec le mot *thea* ("θεα"[1]) est 'l'acte de regarder', c'est aussi 'un objet de contemplation' et est aussi le 'théâtre', le 'lieu d'où et vers où l'on regarde'. (Lié au *thaumaturge*, du grec *thauma* le miracle).

Il s'agit donc de 'voir' au théâtre.

Mais 'voir' dans le sens du miracle. Non seulement par le sens mais surtout 'voir' par miracle le Sens ...nouveau...inattendu...hasardeux donné à 'Voir' et à vivre avec risque par la disposition neuve de la matière du texte rendue vive par le courage de l'acteur à être éthique dans son laisser se faire neuf le Sens pour la pensée.

Il s'agit d'un miracle sur le Réel se disposant en réalité.

Ici est à comprendre que 'Voir' et 'faire 'Voir' n'est justement pas 'com-prendre' une éventuelle complexité préexistente dans le texte, mais avoir le courage éthique de se laisser se dé-prendre – ou dis-prendre....! – dans l'événement neuf que peuvent laisser apparaître les grands textes.

Mais il s'agit bien de se rendre au Réel, glisser vers l'arké. 'Se rendre' dans le sens d'une reddition, qui fait qu'on Voit alors qu'on ne voit rien.

Alors que au théâtre avec un petit 't', on voit, mais on ne Voit pas parce qu'il n'y a rien à Voir. Il y a juste à reconnaître facilement et confortablement des figures préexistantes composées un peu différemment.

Badiou redit cela ici: "Il y a en revanche un « théâtre » qui comble, un théâtre de significations établies, un théâtre auquel rien ne fait défaut, et ce théâtre, abolissant le hasard, induit chez ceux qui haïssent la vérité une satisfaction conviviale."⁶

Badiou le redit ici:

Il n'y a Théâtre (et non théâtre) que dans la conjonction du texte qu'il suscite, de la division qu'il instruit, de la pensée hasardeuse d'un metteur en scène pour qui ce texte est le

⁶ Badiou, *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre*, 42.

filtre d'une divination, d'acteurs aptes à déployer le point de départ réel qu'eux seuls constituent, plutôt qu'à faire montre des rhétoriques du corps et de la voix, et d'au moins un Spectateur.⁷



Badiou: "N'est à proprement parler théâtre que ce qui a été, est, ou sera joué....Le texte de théâtre n'existe qu'au futur antérieur."⁸

Bien comprendre que là est tout ce glissement du Théâtre vers le Réel. Le texte ne peut trouver son événement inattendu que dans le jeu ouvert risqué dans l'infinition, l'incomplétion, l'ouverture de l'inconnu dont le texte et le corps est le site évènementiel. Site dont il faut comprendre qu'il n'est pas l'endroit de l'événement mais la matière dispose qui ouvre l'espace ou il prendra corps chez le Spectateur au moment où il Verra....

C'est aussi cela que dit Badiou: "Ce qui se passe, c'est que le réel de la représentation s'empare du texte, et le fait être théâtre, ce qu'il n'était que par son incomplétude."⁹

Le texte doit s'être rendu au Réel, par le courage éthique de l'acteur qui le fait un peu s'y tenir et lui laisse l'orientation ouverte neuve sans direction, que le Spectateur prendra pour Voir.

Le texte a priori est dans l'incomplétude et l'acteur a le courage éthique de s'y tenir, comme d'ailleurs doit le faire le spectateur qui voit, pour qu'il devienne le Spectateur qui Voit.

Badiou en dit un des possibles: "Mais si un texte est de théâtre parce qu'il est texte, donc livré à l'achèvement évènementiel de la représentation, tout livre peut voir le théâtre s'en emparer, si d'abord il le défait, le détotalise, le ponctue."¹⁰

Le Théâtre ne peut être de figures composées. Les figures composées sont de l'entier pour de l'entier. Il suffit d'en voir la composition ou la recomposition, sans qu'il n'y ait rien à Voir.

⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

Le Théâtre est fait de matière au sens grec du terme 'ce qui ouvre le possible'.

La matière n'est donc pas entière. Elle n'est pas 'faite'. Elle est dé-faite. Il faut cette défaite que la matière offre contrairement aux figures composées. Il faut cette défaite de la matière pour la reddition du spectateur...pour que le spectateur puisse se rendre à la matière....Mais pas à de la matière brute, le metteur en scène doit y avoir mis ou trouver, ou 'Vu', des points...qui tiennent....tout simplement... comme un commencement....éthique...et livrent à l'acteur le cran éthique dont il doit avoir le courage.

On voit bien que tout dans le Théâtre est affaire de tenue inaugurale...de commencement....éthique.

....Comme est le lieu,
 mais
 comme ne l'est pas la place
 comme ne l'est pas la situation
 comme ne l'est pas la position
 comme l'est encore moins la com-position
 mais
 comme l'offre la dis-position.
 Le lieu du théâtre est une composition.
 Le lieu du Théâtre est une disposition.
 Mais la disposition n'est évidemment 'pas-toute'....

C'est pourquoi très justement, Badiou dit: "Si le théâtre est de l'ordre du pas-tout, il est essentiellement féminin."¹¹

Le lieu n'est pas-tout. Le lieu est féminin. Et on peut déjà amorcer ceci: le lieu du Théâtre contemporain n'est pas 'le lieu d'une chose' pour lequel Heidegger a dit qu'il rassemblait sur soi l'être de la chose. La chose est ce qui en soi ou sur soi prend corps. Ou n'est pas encore objet....Mais le Théâtre, ce n'est pas du tout cela. Ce n'est pas du tout un objet inachevé. Ou cela ne montre pas une chose. Ce n'est même pas une substance....Le Théâtre ne prend pas corps, il s'ouvre et dis-pose et c'est le corps de l'autre, du spectateur devenant Spectateur

¹¹ Ibid., 74.

qui Voit...si cet événement se tient...et laisse démarrer une procédure de vérité...par après...dans la vie pour la Vie....

Le Théâtre, tout au plus, met en état, met en dis-position de Voir....un état en disposition non en composition.

Il ne faut pas de substance...qui est évidemment la qualité de la com-position.

Il faut de la dis-stance.

Le Théâtre en dis-position n'est fait que de stances et dis-stances sans sub-stance. Contrairement au théâtre, tout de substances préétablies en com-position.

(On le relit ici: Badiou: "Le 'théâtre' nous propose une mise en signe de substances supposées. Le Théâtre, une procédure qui exhibe l'humanité générique, c'est à dire des différences indiscernables qui ont lieu sur scène pour la première fois."¹²)

Et Badiou qui l'a déjà dit pour les textes le dit alors pour les acteurs: "L'acteur pourrait montrer un sujet sans substance. Il y a un cogito de l'acteur plus proche sans doute de celui de Lacan que de celui de Descartes: là où l'on pense que je suis, je ne suis pas, étant là où je pense que l'on pense qu'est l'Autre."¹³

Badiou pense aussi que, non pas le spectateur, mais le Spectateur....est un acteur....Il dit quelque part que le Spectateur n'est pas en face à face avec un spectacle qui se joue hors de lui. Le Spectateur doit faire part comme acteur...insubstantiel...en dis-position...éthique. Le Spectateur est tout aussi en courage éthique ouvert que celui qui rend le texte auquel il faut se rendre.

Voici ce qu'il dit sur l'acteur, que nous voyons tant comme celui qui pro-pose le texte - l'acteur-, que celui qui s'y pro-pose – le Spectateur: "La vertu centrale de l'acteur n'est pas technique, elle est éthique....Il faut se tenir au bord du vide, au bord du gouffre."¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 91.

¹³ Ibid., 82.

¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

Au pas du Réel dirait Marc Belderbos....

Tout cela il le faut. Car le Théâtre traite non pas de ce qu'il y a déjà, ni même de ce qu'il y aura. Il traite de cette distance terrible que la vie anthropique et non animale a au Réel impossible où il est condamné à poser ou à tenir une réalité qui se tient. P95: "Un spectacle de théâtre est chaque soir, une inauguration du sens....L'acteur, l'actrice, sont le pur courage de cette inauguration."¹⁵

J'ajoute: Le Spectateur aussi.

Le pur courage de cette inauguration.

Notamment car: "Justement au théâtre, il n'y a pas d'images, il n'y a que des combinaisons sensibles dont la perception, si elle est soutenue avec exactitude, éclaire l'instant".¹⁶

et

"Le théâtre serait la perception de l'instant comme instant de la pensée".¹⁷

Affaire tout à fait terrible de la condamnation de l'anthrope non animal à attendre l'instant si distant et n'apparaissant que par intimité insue.

Cette affaire terrible du Théâtre, qui n'est pas du tout du cinéma, qui n'est pas du tout image, n'a évidemment pas de place a priori, pas d'emplacement a priori, pas de position a priori. Le Théâtre est purement inaugural. Il inaugure. Il est avant le Sujet mais lui offre une possibilité de le devenir.... même seulement un instant...peut-être pas éternel....

Le Théâtre ne cherche pas à être, il ne cherche pas d'ailleurs, il ouvre et offre par la tenue éthique à pouvoir tenir...à Voir...à avoir...là où l'on pense que je suis, et je ne suis pas, étant là où je pense que l'on pense qu'est l'Autre. Il y a donc là une affaire terrible de stance avant tout Être et d'in-stance en in-stant. La stance est l'ouverture même. C'est elle qui fonde le 'lieu'.

¹⁵ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

Cela Badiou le dit comme ceci: "L'essence éternelle d'un spectacle est dans son avoir-en-lieu"¹⁸. ...Non pas 'd'être en lieu' mais *avoir-en-lieu*. Affaire terrible, car il n'y a rien avant.

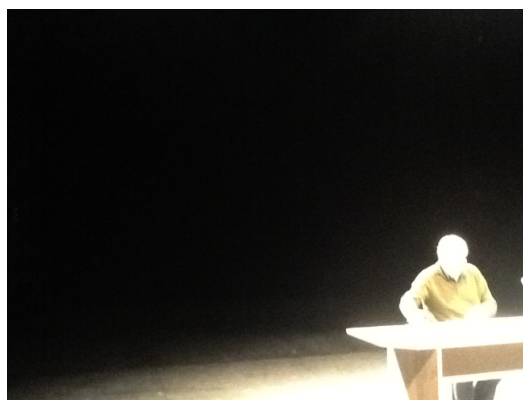
Le lieu est inaugural. Il est fait de stances à dis-stances, purs événements inauguraux de ce que l'on puisse tenir que l'on 'est', non pas substantiel mais ouverture en dis-position en désidération, en désir, d'abord en dialectique terrible au Réel, et sans doute particulièrement au point de la différence des sexes, c'est dire à l'amour, et ensuite dans l'illusion de la réalité tout de même illusoire.

Voilà la tragédie.

Et Badiou en une phrase de son inventivité permanente synthétique de ce qui est dit ci-dessus nous la montre en espace...possiblement architectural: "Une tragédie moderne devrait inéluctablement nous convoquer à penser le non-sens du droit."¹⁹

Donc pas l'espace d'Epidaure où les grecs, inventaient le 'je' droit face au Réel, comme ils l'avaient fait au Parthénon où ils avaient mis ensemble les colonnes, matière concentrées en points se tenant droit au réel en élévation sacrée. Epidaure où les spectateurs se tenaient en hémicycle **droit** devant le 'réel' pas encore monde, pas encore paysage avec la scène ronde mi-côté spectateurs, mi-côté Réel pas encore monde.

Pas plus l'espace de La Commune – Aubervilliers, endroit de son séminaire où un public est droit devant un cadre derrière lequel se joue du théâtre, mais que lui, Badiou, laisse en trou noir suggérant le Réel lors de ses séminaires.



¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹⁹ Ibid., 123.

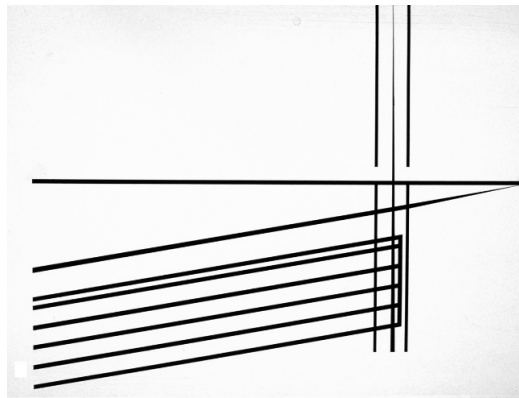
Pas de face à face écarté entre la tragédie et le spectateur droit devant, regardant droit devant. Tout cela tourne au passé ou au non-sens.

Pour aujourd'hui pour la tragédie d'aujourd'hui, non encore formulée, il ne faut pas du droit. Qu'est-ce que c'est le 'droit'. C'est ce qui va toujours vers soi-même. Badiou veut dire que le sens n'est pas droit. Qu'est ce qui n'est pas droit? L'oblique qui va vers l'autre, car elle ne va pas tout droit vers ce qu'elle voit droit devant elle. L'oblique va vers l'autre inconnu...et la courbe qui n'est qu'une variation continue de l'oblique, elle est oblique partout, et se courbe donc. La vérité est oblique. Elle va vers de l'autre invraisemblable. L'oblique, qui ne doit pas être une ligne évidemment, est en dis-position permanente et continue dans le temps. Elle nécessite le droit car il n'y a pas d'oblique sans droit. Mais elle introduit le 'deux' en disposition permanente et infinie. Et elle introduit le champ orienté entre droit et oblique nous laissant nous introduire au sens que le droit seul ne peut évidemment pas dire puisque, seul, il est hors orientation.

Le droit seul est sans matière au sens qu'il ne laisse rien d'autre possible. L'oblique, par le 'deux', fonde du possible, fonde de la matière au sens grec 'ce qui rend possible'.

Le lieu, inauguration ou arké du 'pouvoir se tenir' en tragédie que Badiou devrait écrire, (ses pièces ne sont pas des tragédies) requerrait un lieu multiple, d'obliques, dis-posé de matières noires absentes et in-finies sans cadre, où rien n'est entouré mais où l'espace même aide à aller vers l'Autre en se dési-dérant ou en désir réel. Un lieu comme une idée. Forcément arké.

En voici un plan possible.



On aura ainsi ce que Badiou dit et que je transforme un peu:

L'arké-itecture du théâtre serait ceci: une machinerie complexe (sept éléments), créant une situation dont la dialectique objective se soutient de la majesté de l'Etat, par du noir absent sur blanc, où la clarté de l'instant peut advenir, dont la dialectique subjective engage une éthique, ou une tenue primitive, en l'exigeant un peu car l'architecture ne peut pas tout. Elle est une action restreinte. Une éthique, spécialement au point de la différence des sexes, qui deviendra amour et amour de l'autre, amour oblique et dont la dialectique absolue, fait advenir un résultat-Sujet, un Spectateur, ayant Vu que la matière peut être disposée. Spectateur dont on ne peut décider si c'est au réel de son désir que la machination l'assigne, ou à la puissance d'une Idée.²⁰

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²⁰ Ibid., 105. Les italiques sont de Badiou.

The Theater of Modern Philosophy

A Review of Alain Badiou, *Rhapsody for the Theatre*,
trans. Bruno Bosteels. New York and London: Verso, 2013.

Arthur Rose

As the English translations of Alain Badiou's work consolidate themselves in the lists of Verso and Bloomsbury, it becomes increasingly important to orient engagements with the work in quasi-political terms that, sadly, have little to do with the truth-seeking aims of philosophy. When even the discreetly experimental interests of an admittedly coterie journal become the target of hoaxes, one may well say that a thinker has 'arrived' in the unfortunate, sensationalist sense. And with this arrival comes the need to mount political, rather than philosophical, defenses. The extraordinary "Rhapsody for the Theatre" mounts, as part of its philosophical defense of the theater, a politically aware defense of its own philosophical contingency. In order for the philosophical 'I' to maintain its fragile defense of a Theater (which "summons

Journal of Badiou Studies 5 :: 2017

ISSN 2049-9027



the spectator at the impasse of a form of thought"¹) against 'theater' (whose public "are marked with an identitarian sign"²), it frames the narrative as, in part, a dialogue with an Empiricist, who demands substantial, 'concrete' examples of the Theatre ("My lists, my lists!"³). The text maintains, in the philosophical form of the dialogue, an awareness that such erstwhile Platonism is bound to get one into trouble in the theater of academic philosophy. But if its 2008 translation for *Theatre Survey* could anticipate this problem through a nuanced integration of forms (it draws on, amongst others, the fragment, the treatise and the dialogue), its republication, by Verso, in 2013 demands a political defense to be mounted on its behalf.⁴ Notably, the decision to append five minor texts to the "Rhapsody" seems motivated more by the demands of philosophical publishing than for the needs of any particular audience. Nor does it contribute a more comprehensive philosophical defense than that of the Rhapsody itself. These texts, which from the 'Art and Philosophy' thesis of *Handbook of Inaesthetics* ("Theatre and Philosophy") through the historical reflections on theater in the second half of the 20th Century to the considerations of Badiou's own work for the theater, seem rather more to defuse, than enrich, the philosophical potential of the original Rhapsody.

This said, the increased circulation of the Rhapsody is only to be encouraged, particularly when it comes to thinking about the proper place of 'place' in Badiou's oeuvre. Badiou begins *Theory of the Subject*, perhaps the first of his masterworks, by returning to Hegel, and the question of alienation, which resolves the separation of an identity from itself with synthesis, and scission, which doesn't. He brings these terms together by considering how both are treatments of placedness. Assuming that something is, it is always both in itself (A) and in its placement (A_p). "What is the meaning of the something-in-itself and the something-for-the-other? Pure identity and placed identity; the letter and the space in which it is marked; theory and practice."⁵ Placement, situation, world: Badiou's language is spatially marked. But the space is always circumscribed by its use, in the performance of a Subject, responding to an Event, relating to a State. If the terminology of the three 'great' works (*Theory of the Subject*, *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds*) is not always consistent with that of the Theatre, readers of Badiou's *Rhapsody for Theatre* will recognize that the elements he designates for the latter have their corollaries in the former:

¹ Alain Badiou, *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York London: Verso, 2013), xxii.

² Idem.

³ Badiou, *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, xxvii.

⁴ Alain Badiou, "Rhapsody for the theatre: A short philosophical treatise," trans. Bruno Bosteels, *Theatre Survey* 49.2 (2008): 187-238.

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), 6.

Three things form a knot: the masses who all of a sudden are gathered in an unexpected consistency (events); the points of view incarnated in organic and enumerable actors (subject-effects); a reference in thought that authorizes the elaboration of discourse based upon the mode in which the specific actors are held together, even at a distance, by the popular consistency to which chance summons them.⁶

Thus, we have as Theatre's elements, a public, actors and a textual referent. These will serve to put into practice the three 'majestic instances' of the theater; that it is an Affair of the State, which is morally suspicious, and requires a Spectator. Each of these instances will be built on difference. Theater divides from Cinema, since the Cinema has no collective public, hence no Spectator. Theatre also splits itself culturally, into those cultures which have Theatre and those that do not. So, Theatre becomes an Affair of the State, because it always raises the place of Theatre in society as a concern for the State. And it becomes morally suspicious, since theatre is "a heresy in action."⁷

What meaning does this have for readers of Badiou, who, perhaps, aren't overly concerned with theater? *Rhapsody for Theatre* fits into the same, anomalous territory as *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, in a number of complex ways. To understand this, it is perhaps necessary to elucidate the difficulties of *Saint Paul* for a thinker as profoundly consistent as Badiou. For it is erroneous to imagine that *Saint Paul* can 'merely' be assigned to the increasing publication of those works we might call 'minor' to Badiou's philosophical project, such as *The Adventure of French Philosophy* or, more pertinently, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*. Nor does it readily conform to the model set out in Badiou's exploration of the conditions, the *Brief Treatises*, *Handbooks*, the works on mathematics. It is not an activist's polemic, a wholly creative work, or a Sartrean Circumstance. Each of these sidestep-reflections provides a compelling enough narrative on the history of philosophy, or the exposition of a condition or a defense, or the analysis of a contemporary political moment, but they are secondary to the principal task Badiou has set himself: to think about the formation of the Subject in the founding of the Event, as the scission of the Situation, or the World. *Saint Paul* is not secondary, since Badiou cannot simply use this philosophy in his analysis of Paul: he must also develop it, often in conversation with an extensive theological oeuvre. *Rhapsody* is similarly implicated in the political ontology Badiou sets forth in his 'major' works, since it, too, clearly plays a part in the development of Badiou's thought.

⁶ Badiou, *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, ix.

⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

It is for this reason that the Verso publication occasions the criticism of my opening paragraph. The additional texts, however interesting on their own terms, are either 'minor' or 'conditional' in the ways I have already gestured towards. Their co-publication seems nothing less than a dilution of the originary force of the Rhapsody, a refusal to recognize its generative abnormality in Badiou's oeuvre. Just as *Saint Paul* occasions more thought than its 'mere' reduction to an exemplary antiphilosophy, the Rhapsody demands a stronger response than its 'apparent' representation of artistic conditionality. It is nothing less than a work of Archi-theater.

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Derrida and Queer Theory

Hite, Christian

punctum books, 2017

ISBN: 9780998531892

<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/derrida-and-queer-theory/>

<https://www.doi.org/10.21983/P3.0172.1.00>